



*jeervadhara*

## **EVALUATION OF PRESENT TRENDS IN MORAL THEOLOGY**

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**Edited by  
John Padipurackal**

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# jeevadhara

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

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## Evaluation of Present Trends in Moral Theology

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## Editorial

The Second Vatican Council envisaged adequate scope for the renewal of moral theology, when it said: "[In like manner the other] theological subjects should be renewed through a more vivid contact with the Mystery of Christ and the history of salvation. Special care should be given to the perfecting of moral theology. Its scientific presentation should draw more fully on the teaching of Holy Scripture and should throw light upon the exalted vocation of the faithful in Christ and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world" (*Optatam Totius*, No. 16.4). It is an undisputed fact that ever since the time of the Council there have been efforts towards such a renewal in moral theology and these are still in progress. The Second Vatican Council's positive appreciation of "what is true and holy" in other religions and high regard for their "manner of life and conduct" as a reflection of "a ray of that truth which enlightens all men" (*Nostra Aetate*, No. 1.5) have prompted moral theologians to make in-depth study of the ethical values and principles of other religions. Its mandate "to uncover with gladness and respect those seeds of the Word which lie hidden" among the national and religious traditions (*Ad Gentes*, No. 11) continues to encourage efforts to articulate the principles of moral response in accordance with the cultural and religious genius of various peoples. The emphasis of the Council on the primacy of conscience has also contributed significantly to the evaluation of approaches taken and attitudes accepted until then (*Gaudium et Spes*, 16; *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3.3). In addition to these searching minds cannot ignore the ecumenical thrust very evident in various fields of theology, and for matter in the discipline of moral theology also. An assessment of our achievements since the Second Vatican Council and the present trends of thinking in moral theology will be conducive to efforts at renewal and innovation.

*Jeevadhara* devotes this issue to study the principles and orientations in moral theology as part of an evaluation of the present day trends and much more to help those in the field with regard to future orientations. The New Testament itself gives us ample evidence for various possible approaches to life situations and moral issues. The Gospels do not give us a uniform approach to ethical questions, although they are uniform in their common concern, namely how to follow Jesus. The first Christian communities also present us with a spectrum of various approaches to the question, namely, how to lead a worthy life giving witness to the

salvation experienced in and through Jesus Christ. The various Christian churches also present various approaches with regard to principles of conduct and life. Andrews Mekkattukunnel, presents the dynamism of the ethical response in the Synoptic Gospels under the title *Walking in the Way of the Lord - A Study of the Ethics of the Synoptic Gospels*. Mark, as it is evident from the text, emphasizes discipleship, where as Matthew focuses on the New Righteousness taught by Jesus and Luke on the profound Compassion expected from the follower of Jesus. Jacob Prasad discusses the tensions within the primitive Christian communities, theoretical and practical, are evident in the epistles of Paul. What theoretical and practical solutions Paul had proposed and what validity these orientations have are the content of the article "*Walking in Newness of Life*" (Rom 6,4) - *Foundations of Pauline Ethics*. Clement Campos C.Ss.R, in his article, *Developments in Fundamental Moral Theology*, introduces various models and approaches adopted by moral theologians. The major challenge before moral theologians of India is to contextualize moral theology so as to meet the challenges raised by the context. How other Christian churches are formulating principles of ethical life is not just a matter of academic interest for any church.

Attention to the orientations of various churches and dialogue with them can mutually enrich churches. Jacob Thomas draws out the orientations of various Protestant churches in his article *Protestant Ethics - Basic Principles and Orientations* to enlighten the readers. The philosophical setting of moral theology or Christian Ethics is irrefutable. However, today philosophy not only provides a background for moral theology in the *ancilla theologiae* tradition, but raises new challenges to Christian ethical endeavor. Tomy Paul Kakkattuthadathil leads us to the present day challenges and promises from the philosophical milieu in his article *Challenges and Promises of Philosophical Ethics*. The article gives us a vivid picture of the challenge before us in our ethical pursuit as well as the need of dialogue with philosophical ethics. The Gandhian way is a challenging model before humanity and especially for those who seriously consider contextualizing moral theology in India. Jose Thachil's contribution *Attitudes and Practice - Gandhian Ethics as a Model* articulates the potency of the Gandhian way to answer contemporary man's problems. All these articles reveal the legitimacy of the efforts that are underway and the long path we need to tread in order to realize the mandate of the Second Vatican Council.

We thank our writers for their scholarly and timely contributions to this issue of *Jeevadhara* and hope that this will help those who aspire for and make earnest efforts at renewal of moral theology.



# Developments in Fundamental Moral Theology

Clement Campos

In this article, the author proposes to indicate some of the important developments in fundamental theology, especially after Vatican II, also some of the factors that influenced to bring about such developments and a few of the challenges facing us today. Rev. Dr. Clement Campos, C.Ss.R is professor of Moral Theology at St. Alphonsus and visiting Professor in J. D. V., Pune and Christu Jyothi, Bangalore.

## I. Changes and Developments in Moral Theology

In 1987, on the occasion of the bi-centenary of the death of St. Alphonsus de Liguori, the patron of moral theologians, Pope John Paul II in an address to Redemptorists indicated that he intended to write an encyclical with the aim of treating more fully and more deeply the issues regarding the very foundations of moral theology. The encyclical was eventually published a few years later as *Veritatis Splendor*. It was a document that, apart from renewing the weakened link between Catholic moral teaching and the Gospel as desired by Vatican II (OT 16), sought to address the problem of "the lack of harmony between the traditional response of the Church and certain theological positions, encountered even in seminaries and in faculties of theology, with regard to questions of the greatest importance for the Church and for the life of faith of Christians" (VS 4.3)<sup>1</sup>. In other words, it attempted to deal with the problems of pluralistic opinions and dissent from the magisterium. This carefully crafted document, however, failed to resolve the problems. Instead it became another topic of controversy<sup>2</sup>.

Donal Harrington in his book, *What is Morality?*<sup>3</sup>, suggests that one reason why there are dissensions and disagreements is that people think about morality in different ways. He presents five ways of looking at morality: morality as law, morality as inner conviction, morality as personal growth, morality as love, and morality as social transformation<sup>4</sup>. I have chosen to consider these "models" because they help us to see the shifts and developments that have taken place in fundamental moral theology<sup>5</sup>.

### **Morality as Law**

This way of looking at morality is probably the most familiar but also one that today is too hastily dismissed. This view sees morality as an external obligation imposed on us; something discovered, not created. It is usually linked with an authority figure (parents, parish priest or Pope). If this aspect is emphasized, a particular action is seen as right because this figure says so, rather than on the grounds of rational argument.

Morality is objective, founded on the nature of things. What morality as law stresses is that there is a moral order in the universe and it is not within human power to decide what that order is. But we can work it out through reflection and discussion. Authority figures help us by interpreting this order for us.

Our own role is seen as obedience. Reward and punishment are also part of this way of looking at morality. The sanctions may vary from a packet of sweets or a spanking for a child to the eternal sanctions of heaven and hell.

### **Morality as Inner Conviction**

In this perspective, morality comes from within; it is internalized, not simply imposed. As a psychological experience it comes later in life as compared to obedience. It presumes our ability to think for ourselves and to see why a law permits or forbids or is even sometimes inapplicable to our situation.

This inner capacity goes by the name of conscience - it is an essential part of a person, a conscientious conviction. In this matter the language of law and obedience is inadequate. Words like integrity and authenticity are more appropriate. If values are internalized and conviction comes



from within, then morality is a matter of being faithful to our inner voice or inner wisdom. This is what it means to be a person of integrity.

The language of reward and punishment yields to something less extrinsic. The alternative is to speak of inner peace versus inner disquiet. Peace comes from knowing that I have been true to my principles and inner disquiet accompanies the realization that I have failed myself.

### **Morality as Personal Growth**

This represents an important shift. We move from focusing on moral behaviour to focusing on ourselves. It is not just a matter of what I am doing but of who I am becoming. In the moral tradition this is the language of virtue and vice - the good and bad dispositions or qualities that result from and then inspire our actions. It is interesting to note that Thomas Aquinas chose virtue rather than commandment as his framework for the moral section of the *Summa*.

In this shift to the person we move from a more static to a more dynamic view of morality. When we speak of the person we speak of growth or regression. This is the language of moral conversion. It gives us access to the dynamics of challenge and change, of what it is like for people to try to change for the better.

In this view we do not speak of reward and punishment or a good or uneasy conscience. We speak of wholeness versus fragmentation. The many virtues (truthfulness, courage, humility, compassion) might be seen as a partial realization of self. Growth in virtue is a many sided challenge and as growth proceeds on different fronts we are becoming whole, the kind of persons God called us to be. When virtue is mingled with vice, the thrust towards wholeness is frustrated and our moral being is fragmented.

### **Morality as Love**

The first three perspectives present the moral agent as an individual person. The next two see morality in terms of relationship and see the moral agent as fundamentally social. To speak of love is to perceive ourselves as related beings. Moral experience is primarily the experience of the other - invitation and response. Within this perspective, being moral is a matter of being faithful to the fact of our interrelatedness and to the demands of relationship. It is going beyond ourselves and our egoism and in the process realizing our existence as love.

Because morality is seen from the point of view of interrelatedness, wrongdoing amounts to a matter of betrayal of others; it is not just a private matter. Though in failing others we ultimately fail ourselves.

The outcome is expressed in terms of communion versus isolation. While reward and punishment refer to what happens to people as a consequence of their action, these speak of what happens to a relationship. In a sense communion is the reward and isolation the punishment.

### **Morality as Social Transformation**

While continuing to see morality in terms of relationship, this model of morality goes beyond the narrow world of interpersonal relationships to the larger world that is society. Just as the view of love was seen as a corrective to individualism in morality, this view transcends the tendency to live within our own small circle without showing any concern about the moral issues facing the larger society.

Moral obligation keeps on reaching outwards. In this perspective, being moral is being personally affected by suffering and injustice and being motivated to do what we can in response. It is about solidarity with victims near or far. Responding is not just about offering aid but about asking why the wrongs are happening and questioning the way things are in society. The opposite of such solidarity is individualism.

The outcome of this morality can be described in terms of social peace versus division. When there is a lively sense of solidarity there is the possibility of transforming society into a place where the humanity of each is cherished and where nobody's suffering is tolerated. In the Christian tradition this is what is known as peace. Whereas if the individualistic ethic prevails, to that extent the divisions that are already there are only deepened and the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. It must be added that solidarity today extends not just to all humanity but to all creation.

### **The Five approaches and Christian Morality**

The question that can be asked is whether any of these perspectives do better justice to the meaning of Christian morality? We may say that all five ways are right in the sense that they offer some truth and insight into morality, yet each is incomplete. While we may have a personal

preference, we must also take account of the other four or risk distortion. We may also say that all five can find support in the Bible. One only has to think of the terms used in morality: the law, the heart, growth in virtue, the way of love or the call for social transformation. Harrington suggests that law, though it has often been the favoured way is not really adequate; the next two with their emphasis on the individual rather than the community are not exactly in tune with the communitarian thrust of the Bible or with the aspect of the priority of God's action. The fourth and fifth with their language of invitation and response and of social transformation offer the most promising approaches to the Bible.

## **II. Factors that Influenced Change**

As we have briefly indicated, the shifts and developments that have taken place in moral theology in the last few decades have been due to a number of factors. Some of these are the result of social upheavals in the world and changing cultural mores. It is not possible to deal with all these factors. I have chosen in this section to focus on a few of the factors within the Church and the Catholic theological community that I think played a major role in these developments.

### **Vatican II**

It has been commonly accepted that Vatican II marked a significant moment in the history of moral theology. Yet, the Council in fact said very little explicitly about moral theology. In the document on priestly formation, it says that special attention needs to be given to the development of moral theology and that its scientific exposition should be more thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching and that it should show the nobility of the Christian vocation of the faithful, and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world (OT16).

However, there are other more fundamental ways in which Vatican had an impact on moral theology. The universal call to holiness (LG 39) led to a development of Christian ethics in terms that saw a shift from a morality of sins to the pursuit of the exalted vocation of the faithful in Christ.

But it would appear that one of the most significant ways in which Vatican II affected moral theology was through its ecclesiology. The rediscovery of the Church as the people of God had implications for



morality. Lay people and priests have the right and responsibility to offer their own contribution to the Church's ongoing task of elaborating and developing moral doctrine. The collegial nature of the Church raised the issue of the use of authority in the moral sphere, the meaning of subsidiarity and freedom in the application of moral principles and the freedom of conscience. The recovery of the ecumenical dimension indicated the need to humbly acknowledge the wisdom present in other Churches and religious traditions. The eschatological nature of the Church made it conscious of the tentative nature of moral and ethical judgments<sup>6</sup>.

Moreover, in seeking to enter into dialogue with the contemporary world, sharing its joys and hopes, its sufferings and anxieties, the Council realized that the agenda for moral reflection and moral action comes from the world rather than from the Church.

One of the main shifts that occurred as a result was a shift towards the subject. According to Kevin Kelly, the most striking point with regard to Vatican II's impact on moral theology is its insistence that the primary criterion for moral evaluation is the good of the human person. This was in no way a rejection of objective morality. Vatican II insisted that morality must be objective but in a way which views the human person holistically. The criterion of objective morality is the nature of the human person 'integrally and adequately considered'<sup>7</sup>.

Another way in which Vatican II challenged and enriched the work of moral theology was through its teaching on the dignity of conscience and its freedom (GS 16 and DH 4). This came to the fore in an event that was to cause great upheaval in the Church just a few years after the Council - the release of the encyclical, *Humanae Vitae* in 1968.

### **Humanae Vitae**

Historians will probably see *Humanae Vitae* as a watershed in the history of moral theology. It created a storm. Theologians by the hundreds signed notes of dissent, thousands left the Church in protest. Episcopal conferences had to issue statements to help the faithful to deal with the urgent pastoral problems facing them. But apart from the teaching itself and the public outcry against it, the encyclical had an enormous impact on the manner of doing moral theology. As one prominent critic put it: "Theologians became freshly aware of the inadequacy of a heavily

juridical notion of the moral teaching office, and correspondingly they became more sensitive to their own responsibilities, especially their occasional duty to dissent in light of their own experience with the faithful and reflection on it. Non-reception became overnight a live theological issue. Questions were raised about the formation of conscience, about the response due to the ordinary magisterium, about the exercise of authority in the Church, about consultative processes and collegiality, about the meaning of the guidance of the Holy Spirit to the pastors of the Church. Contraception, as a moral issue, was virtually smothered in the ecclesiological tumult<sup>8</sup>.

The theological upheaval following *Humanae Vitae* gave rise to polarization in the Church, pluralism, and, as far as fundamental moral theology was concerned, gave an impetus to the question of intrinsically evil acts and proportionalism.

### Rediscovering the Human

William E. May titled one of his books on fundamental moral theology "Becoming Human". He rightly saw the moral theological enterprise as an invitation to become human. This was an insight of Vatican II. In speaking about decision making in the area of responsible parenthood, it stated that the moral aspect of any procedure does not depend solely on sincere intentions or an evaluation of motives but must be determined by objective standards, "which are based on the human person and his acts" (GS 51). The official commentary indicates that this was meant to be a general principle, which is formulated thus: "Human activity must be judged insofar as it refers to the human person integrally and adequately considered"<sup>9</sup>.

The human person is not a static, unchanging entity and must be considered in a historically conscious manner<sup>10</sup>. This affects a theme that is very much part of fundamental moral theology, namely, natural law. In its essential features, the doctrine of natural law states "that every man can grasp through his reasoning powers the main ethical implications of his own being taken in all his relationships to God, the world, and other persons . . . Man's own being serves as the ontological basis for what man should become through his free choices . . . Simply stated, the doctrine of natural law holds that man must fashion, guide and enlighten his own ethical life-project by taking due account of the infinitely varied

and dynamic possibilities inherent in his unique self. Man becomes a law unto himself in fulfilling the innermost demands of his being towards authentic self-realization"<sup>11</sup>. Harrington puts it more simply when he says that natural law is the method, of reason reflecting on nature, through which we discover moral truth "reason reflecting on nature means people reflecting on their own human being and their own experience of being human. It means reflecting on what it is to be a human person"<sup>12</sup>. But if being a human person means to be a being-on- the-way, natural law, if it is to make sense today, must take into consideration the aspect of change and growth and development.

Natural Law is an important dimension for those of us who live in a pluralistic society. It means that we can enter into dialogue with people of all beliefs since we share a common humanity. An example of this is the Parliament of World Religions in 1993 which led to the declaration of a "global ethic" whose fundamental demand was that every human being must be treated humanely. This was accompanied with four irrevocable directives; commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life; commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order; commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness; commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women<sup>13</sup>.

Yet another aspect of the emphasis on the human person is the realization that human experience becomes a locus theologicus<sup>14</sup>. That is why it is important to note that Vatican II stated that "the Church must rely on those who live in the world, are versed in different institutions and specialities, and grasp their innermost significance in the eyes of both believers and unbelievers" (GS 44). Obviously there is a responsibility on the part of the lay person who is called to be an active partner in the task of moral discernment (GS 43).

The emphasis on the human person has also led to moral theologians taking heed of the discoveries from the field of social and empirical sciences. One obvious area is the influence of psychology in moral education and formation of conscience.

Anthropological studies have also led to renewed philosophical understandings about human freedom. The work of Rahner<sup>15</sup> with his distinction between transcendental freedom and categorical freedom has



led to the development of the idea of fundamental option and a consequent reappraisal of the meaning of sin and its distinctions. This theme of fundamental option was later taken up by Bernard Haring and other moral theologians<sup>16</sup> and has even entered the official vocabulary of the magisterium<sup>17</sup>.

### **Liberation Theology**

This model of theology developed in the late sixties and flourished in the seventies and eighties. The pioneers were theologians who were trained academically in Europe but discovered a new way of doing theology while sharing the oppression and poverty of the victims of injustice. Confronted by a situation of massive poverty and injustice, where structures ensured that the rich got richer and the poor became poorer, they began to read the Scriptures from the perspective of the poor and began to discover that God spoke not only through the Scriptures but through the suffering of the people. Struggle for justice was seen as an essential constituent of proclaiming the Gospel and salvation was no longer perceived as mere deliverance from sin but also as liberation from all forms of oppression, political, economic and social. This theology brought to the fore the concept of social sin and the "sinful structures" that perpetuated the system.

This theology has had its impact on moral theology. McCormick indicates three ways in which it has done so<sup>18</sup>. First, it did away with the separatist mentality that saw Christian realities basically as other-worldly realities. There is a radical continuity between the eschatological promises and hope and human liberation from systemic oppression. Secondly, as liberation theologians point out, the Church's mission of charitable action is not merely that of social critique, but involves a commitment to active participation in the construction of a just social order. Thirdly, liberation theology is a constant reminder of the primaries of social concerns in moral theology and thus serves as a corrective to the individualism of the West. One of the significant developments in moral theology is the attempt to work out a comprehensive moral theology from a liberation perspective<sup>19</sup>.

### **Feminism**

When Haring published his groundbreaking work, *The Law of Christ*, he provided a sub-title, namely, Moral Theology for Priests and Laity. It

caused a bit of a stir. Moral theology till then was considered the preserve of the priest, training him in the art of hearing confessions. We have moved forward a great deal since then. Not only do we have lay people who have specialized in moral theology, a number of them are women. Lisa Sowle Cahill, Anne Patrick, Margaret Farley, Linda Hogan, to name a few at random, have made significant contributions to moral theology. But it is important that their voices be heard because they bring a different dimension to the discourse. The obvious areas are those of marriage and sexuality and the family and certain areas of medical ethics and human rights. But their influence is perceived in more subtle ways. One example is seen in the area of moral education. Lawrence Kohlberg, building on the insights of Piaget, developed a six-stage schema with three levels (the preconventional, the conventional and the postconventional) to show the moral development of children. These stages, according to Kohlberg, are characterized by ways of knowing what is moral and what is not. They move, in a predictable fashion from the sense that things are right simply because they are permitted and approved by the person in authority to the sense that things are right because they are consistent with universal principles. While it has been widely diffused, this theory is not without its critics. Carol Gilligan states that Kohlberg's research seems to presume a characteristically male way of thinking and understanding. In her work, *In Another Voice*, she looks at the differences in moral understanding between males and females. Her studies point out that males and females interpret moral problems from different orientations, involving distinct conceptions of the self and its relation to others. While females favour an ethic of care and responsibility, males tend towards an ethic of right and justice<sup>20</sup>.

Kevin T. Kelly suggests "that Christian theology is substantially flawed because it has been constructed predominantly by men and in the light of men's experience of a world in which women were second-rate citizens and women's experience was not considered theologically important". For him moral theology is not truly human without the full participation of women<sup>21</sup>.

### Proportionalism

A glance through the Moral Theology Notes published every year in the first issue of *Theological Studies* during the seventies and eighties would reveal that the theme most often discussed was the issue of

"proportionalism". Though its origins are traced to exploratory articles by Peter Knauer on the principle of double effect, wherein he gave the greatest importance to the condition of a proportionate reason, this theory developed into an attempt to revise moral theology especially after the publication of *Humanae Vitae*. "The fundamental thesis of the system of proportionate reason is that at least in the case of concrete moral norms it is never possible to judge that any human act is intrinsically immoral, without at the same time considering all the circumstances (including circumstantial intentions). Consequently, the basic principle of moral judgment is that to determine whether a concrete act is moral it is necessary to weigh the positive and negative values involved in this act, including its circumstances, and then to judge it good if there is a proportionate reason to perform the act, i.e., if the positive values outweigh the negative"<sup>22</sup>. A corollary of this theory is that there are no absolute moral norms. Many criticisms were made of this theory and it was condemned in *Veritatis Splendor*. Among the reasons given against the theory were that it went against the traditional wisdom based on Romans 3:8, that one may not do evil that good may come of it; that it was relativistic, extrinsicist and flawed. Despite the strong criticism, proportionalism claims a lot of adherents and has in a sense polarized the moral theological community and incurred the displeasure of the magisterium.

## Challenges

Some years ago, Felix Wilfred bemoaned the fact that in most seminaries in India the basic text used in moral theology is K. H. Peschke's *Christian Ethics*, which is a manual written by a European. There is some merit in the criticism. Most of the books and articles published by moral theologians in India betray a dependence on Western theologies, as does the present article. While many Indian moral theologians have done their doctoral dissertations on Indian religious scriptures and Indian thinkers or attempted to study specific problems in India, there has been no sustained attempt to contextualize moral theology<sup>23</sup>. As this article also indicates, most of the developments in fundamental moral theology have taken place in a first world setting, apart from a few significant efforts in Latin America.

We must not forget that the moral theologian in India faces a daunting prospect. He is called to do his task in a context that is highly complex.



Two aspects of this complex reality are immediately evident: the great cultural and religious heritage that has shaped the life and mores of the people of this land and the socio-economic situation which is predominantly one of massive poverty and injustice and corruption. The religious traditions have instilled in the people a deep spiritual sense and a longing for union with the divine. At the same time, religion has also been an instrument of alienation and of legitimation and, more recently, with the rise of fundamentalism, it has become a violently disruptive force. The harsher side of reality in India is the massive scale of poverty and the growing scale of inequalities caused by the present pattern of development. The task, as the Indian (moral) theologian sees it, is to create a theology that is at once liberative and yet firmly rooted in the pluriform cultural and religious traditions of the land.

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### Foot Notes

- 1 Servais (Th.) Pinckaers, "An Encyclical for the Future: *Veritatis Splendor*", *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology*, ed. J. A. DiNoia and Romanus Cessario, Huntington, In: Our Sunday Visitor, 1999, 12-13.
- 2 See the divergent views expressed in the commentaries on *Veritatis Splendor* in John Wilkins ed. *Understanding Veritatis Splendor*, London: SPCK, 1994.
- 3 Donal Harrington, *What is Morality?*, Dublin: Columba Press, 1996.
- 4 Similar models are found in Sean Fagan, *Does Morality Change?* Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1997, 34-45. See also William Cosgrave, *Christian Living Today: Essays in Moral and Pastoral Theology*, Dublin: Columba Press, 2001, 9-22.
- 5 In this section I have mostly paraphrased Harrington's work.
- 6 Richard McCormick, *Corrective Vision: Explorations in Moral Theology*, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1994, 5-6.
- 7 Kevin T. Kelly, *From a Parish Base: Essays in Moral and Pastoral Theology*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999, 114-115.
- 8 McCormick, *Corrective Vision*, 10. John Mahoney devotes an entire chapter to a study of the impact of *Humanae Vitae* in *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1987.

- 9 *Acta Synodalia Concilii Vaticani II*, vol. IV, part 7, p. 502, n.37.
- 10 Good summaries of what it means to be human can be found in Louis Janssens, "Artificial Insemination: Ethical Considerations", *Louvain Studies* 8 (1980) 3-29 and John Macquarrie, *Three Issues in Ethics*, London: SCM Press, 1970.
- 11 George M. Regan, *New Trends in Moral Theology*, New York: Newman Press, 1971, 117.
- 12 *What is Morality?*, 97.
- 13 Harrington, *What is Morality?*, 106.
- 14 McCormick, *Corrective Vision* 19-20.
- 15 Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1978). See also his studies on the theology of human freedom in *Theological Investigations*, Volume 6, Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969.
- 16 Bernard Haring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, Volume 1, New York: Seabury Press, 1978, 164-222; Timothy O'Connell, *Principles for a Catholic Morality*, New York: Seabury Press, 1978, 57-66.
- 17 *Catechesi Tradendae*, 39.
- 18 *Corrective Vision*, 13-14.
- 19 e.g. Francisco Moreno, *Moral Theology from the Poor*, Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1988; and Antonio Moser and Bernardino Leers, *Moral Theology; Dead Ends and Alternatives*, New York: Orbis Books, 1990.
- 20 Terence Kennedy, *Doers of the Word: Moral Theology for the Third Millennium*, Liguori, Mo: Triumph Books, 1996, 209. Kennedy, while admitting that there is much truth in Gilligan's observations, critiques Gilligan's position, since women can be well aware of justice and men can show care.
- 21 Kevin T. Kelly, *New Directions in Moral Theology: The Challenge of Being Human*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992, 86.
- 22 Benedict M. Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love: a Biblical Introduction to Moral Theology*, New York : Alba House, 1996, 134. For a study of its origins and a list of authors who support this theory see Bernard Hoose, *Proportionalism: The American Debate and Its European Roots*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1987.
- 23 There have been some sporadic attempts. See, for example, S. Arokiasamy, "Sarvodaya through Antodaya: The liberation of the Poor in the Contextualization of Morals", *Vidyajyoti* 51 (1987) 545-564; Xavier Ilango, "Morality from a Dalit Perspective", *Jeevadhara* XXVIII no. 168 (1998) 426-440.

# **Protestant Ethics - Basic Principles and Orientations**

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According to the author there are three major confessional approaches to ethics, viz., Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. It is the nuances in the theological emphasis that differentiate them. This paper is limited to a discussion of some basic ethical principles of orientation in the Protestant traditions such as Lutheran, Calvinist, Anabaptist, with their modern trend to a God-Neighbour-Creation Ethics. Rev. Dr. Jacob Thomas has a Ph. D. from Union Theological Seminary, New York and is presently teaching in Gurukul Theological College, Chennai.

Reflection on how to live as a Christian, as a disciple of Christ, in the world - in awareness of its sinful condition - is what constitutes Christian ethics. While it is the theological premises that distinguish Christian ethics from the various secular ethical traditions, it is the nuances in the theological emphasis that differentiate the various ethical positions within the Christian tradition.

If our theological premises are blind to the actual situation of the world - the socio-communal, the biophysical, and the geo-planetary - our ethic becomes moralistic, unrealistic and irrelevant. Similarly, if our theological premises have no say in our decision making process, then our ethic becomes unprincipled and anaemic. Different methods of relating faith to the context account for the several ethical traditions. Apart from the tension between the two long established ethical methods of teleological and deontological - goal oriented and duty oriented or ethics of the good, ethics of aspiration on the one hand and ethics of the right, ethics of obedience and obligation on the other, which are not



limited to any particular denomination - there are tensions resulting from various confessional positions. Broadly speaking there are three major confessional approaches to ethics, namely, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. The prominence attached to the magisterium, the teaching authority of the Church, or to the tradition, or to the individual's ability to make decisions marks the differences among their ethical approaches. The absence of any magisterial authority, or weight of tradition provides a climate of greater freedom to the Protestants in moral choices. There is no institutional way to find out the protestant position to any particular moral problem. Still the Protestants have their own process of making moral decisions based on particular doctrines characteristic of their traditions, such as "justification of faith" or "two kingdoms theory" in Lutheranism, "sovereignty of God" or "sanctification" in Calvinism, "discipleship" or "radical obedience" in Anabaptist or Reformed movements. This paper is limited to a discussion on some of the basic ethical principles of orientations in Protestant tradition which are in vogue today.

## **1. Basic Themes in Lutheran Ethics**

### **Justification by Grace**

The central principle of Lutheran ethics is undoubtedly justification by grace through faith in Christ. Luther conceived it as a "happy exchange" with Christ. Love of God in Christ permeates our souls and this love flows to the neighbour "spontaneously from faith and no longer from the compulsions of the law", since agape love cannot be domesticated into principles and rules (Benne 1998:14-15). Only people justified by grace are Christians. Moral acts can come only from moral persons (Forell 1954:84). Christian morality is a response to the Gospel. "We need not climb up some ladder of increasing righteousness to make ourselves worthy of God" (Benne 1998: 12). According to Luther, we are made holy not because of any extraordinary obedience or even faith but because of the extraordinary grace of God in Christ. In Luther's religious and theological context, one's relationship to the judge was more important than one's obedience to the law (Gustafson 1978:9). That is the meaning of "made righteous". The person is declared righteous by the judge's act, not on the basis of one's righteous act other than one's faith and trust in the judge. It frees ethics from the need of numbering and grading sins.

## Rejection-Appropriation of Natural Law

Protestant ethics since the time of Reformation has rejected the natural law tradition and its metaphysics. If there is any thing dogmatic about Protestant ethics it is the protection of human freedom from the dangers of legalism and works-righteousness (Huetter 1998:36). Luther, however, did not wipe out all the vestiges of the natural law tradition. In the doctrines of the orders of creation and the two realms, reason has taken the role of determining what justice or duties are. Luther also has accepted the Golden Rule as a statement of the natural law (Gustafson 1978: 10). Religious significance of the role of law and obedience to it was an area where Luther and the Roman Catholic Church quarrelled.

## Civic and Theological uses of the law

Natural law, according to Luther, is the basic occasion for sin. There is no need of such law or political organisation before sin. It is God who ordered political and economic ordinances, polity, as the remedy for corrupt nature. Luther describes polity as the kingdom of sin. The chief work of political institution is to keep out sin (Inge 1930: 226). This is the civil use of law. Obviously, Luther found the first use of law as ordering human life. Law is necessary in the world - forming, ordering, maintaining life, making righteousness possible. Luther considers this acceptable so long as it is not misused to provide justification in the sight of God (Ebeling 1964: 139). But the law becomes a hindrance when it is used as a method of justification, a prescription for do-it-yourself salvation (White 1981: 158).

However, for Luther, the primary purpose of the law has been theological or spiritual one, not to orient persons to God, but rather to increase their transgressions to the point where they despair of their righteousness and were led to a radical trust in God for their salvation (Gustafson 1978: 13). This theological use of the law has been called the strange work of law, of attacking all pretensions of human righteousness. Instead of making humans free law accuses, judges, kills, and drives one to despair, thus making people realise their true nature and rely on God for their salvation. "God promotes and perfects his proper work by means of his alien work" (LW 57: 211.9f; 57:128:13. in White 1981:159). These two uses of law demands two different ethical responsibilities: firstly, moral life under civic uses of law or in the order

of creation - an ethics of natural reason; secondly, moral life under faith - the ethics of justification, forgiveness and righteousness imputed by God's grace. Lutheran ethic is thus able to provide inner freedom to persons.

### **Human Freedom within the Limits of God's Commandments: Law and the Gospel**

Luther believed in human ability to choose between different possibilities of action. Humans are morally responsible for their actions. They can exercise their will in things subject to them and in secular morality; but it is meaningless to speak of free will in relation to God "God did not create the kingdom of heaven for geese ... But we are asking whether [human] has free will towards God, so that God obeys and does what [human] wills" (LW 18:767.40; 18:636.18 in White 1981:156). To Erasmus Luther wrote: "Our purpose is to investigate what the free will is capable of and how it is related to, the grace of God" (LW 18: 614. 1-16 in White 1981:155). In his famous Treatise on Christian Liberty, Luther's *magna carta* of Christian life, he asserts: "A Christian is perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all" (Luther 1961:53). According to him, we are perfectly freed by the gospel of Christ to bind ourselves in love to the needs of others even when that means "bold sinning" (Childs 1998:105).

God works through the structures of life which Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "orders of creation" or "mandates", George Forell, "natural orders", Gustaf Wingren, "Law of Creation", Robert Benne "places of responsibility" (Bonhoeffer 1955:73; Forell 1954: 112ff, Benne 1998:13). These structures provide moral contexts within which we live. These structures are shaped by the Decalogue. All human beings have this capacity to discern the moral ordering of our common life. These natural orders are not something static; they are dynamic (Wingren 1961). These are shaped not only by God; they are subject to the individual and corporate sins of humans, who "can bend them away from God's intention". However, "God's hidden hand works through them in mysterious and unrecognised ways" (Benne 1998:13). Discerning God's law in these structures is a challenge for Christian ethics. Christian freedom finds its *gestalt*, shape and form, in remembering God's commandments and continuously addressed by it, and perceiving it

rightly (Huetter 1998: 44-46). According to Huetter, "[t]here are no simple, fixed answers, but there are unquestionable limitations to which all humans are bound ..." (1998: 50). Decalogue provides for human freedom within these limits and that is also the purpose of the natural law, the law of creation. It is God's law in the Ten Commandments that help us to recognise the will of God present in the creation. Natural law unaided by the Decalogue, and its development in the biblical tradition, is not a helpful guide to Christian living, rather, a distortion.

Luther conceived the nature of human beings as one of "voluntaristic, activist" (Richard Niebuhr, see White 1981: 155). The nature of human beings cannot be static "without doing or not doing something, enduring or running away from something, for life never rests". Life is a kind of movement, always travelling, a pilgrimage, constantly from act to act, from potentiality to potentiality, from understanding to understanding, from faith to faith, from glory to glory, from knowledge to knowledge (LW 56422. 15 in White 1981: 155). Life is always in a state of non-being, becoming, and being, always in sin, in justification, in righteousness: human being is always a sinner, penitent and always justified (White 1981:155).

In Lutheran ethics a person can freely and joyously do what the moral law and social roles require. Morality is the state of the agent, motives and dispositions that faith and grace induce (Gustafson: 1978: 15). Luther identified three orders where Christians exercise their responsibility: family, state and Church. Later Lutherans recognized four: marriage and family life, work, public life (citizenship and voluntary association) and church (Benne 1998:15). These are the places in which all humans are given the obligation to live responsible lives.

### **Twofold Rule of God**

The most difficult aspect in Lutheran social ethics is the doctrine of the twofold rule of God or the "two-kingdom" doctrine, as called by Barth. Lutherans are more comfortable and confident about their mandate for ethical witness in the personal sphere than in the realm of public policy. Luther's 1522 publication "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed" has featured his concept of God's two modes of governance, though the actual term, "the doctrine of two kingdoms" was coined only in the 1930s. When conceived dualistically it prevents



the church from having any role in the socio-political realm. The inner sphere of life, the personal is forbidden to interfere with the outer sphere, the political. This doctrine certainly makes a distinction between two ways of God's working in the world, two strategies that God uses to deal with the powers of evil and the reality of sin, two approaches to human beings, but this duality should not be taken as dualism, a complete separation of two different orders, but must be interpreted dialectically and paradoxically. This doctrine is intended to mobilize the two areas of life for active cooperation (Braaten 1983: 135). The twofold rule of God is related to Luther's treatment of Law and Gospel. Law cannot be made into the gospel or the gospel made into the law. God rules the "kingdom on the left" with the law and the "kingdom on the right" with the gospel with the purpose of redeeming the creation, but employing different methods. If law is redemptive Christ is unnecessary. If the gospel is all-encompassing then the power of sin and evil is of no consequence. The Church operates in society only with the power of the word, with the power of persuasion, not coercion. Gospel judges the world in the light of God's eschatological future, but it cannot be captured or legislated in the present (Benne 1998:25).

Ernst Troeltsch and Reinhold Niebuhr condemned the way the Lutheran ethics relates to public life as "cynical, and defeatist, leading to a pallid quietism". By calling the doctrine of the twofold rule as a "doctrine of Two-Kingdoms", Barth was actually making a criticism of the misuse of the doctrine for the justification of the atrocities executed by Adolph Hitler by his National Socialism (Benne 1998:18; 22).

### **Reconciling the Double Morality of the Two-Realms Theory**

Modern Lutheran scholars have emphasized the indivisibility of love and the linkage of the two realms, and how they have mitigated the influence of dualist thinking. This has helped to avoid the danger of double morality as it shows the intimate connection between personal and social ethics in the concept and dynamic of Christian neighbourly love. Luther's two realms thought was realistic about the quest for future driven by love (Childs 1998:101). If true Christian love really prevailed there would be no need for a "left hand" rule of law. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, though recognized the distinctive roles of church and state argued that it is the duty of the church to confront the state and even become involved in direct political action when the state fails in its

function (Childs 1998: 101). William H. Lazareth called it the "prophetic counterpart to the priesthood" of all believers (Lazareth 1966:131). His article, "Luther's Two-Kingdoms' Ethic Reconciled", written for the World Council of Churches reflects the new consciousness of the Lutherans on the doctrine of a "fundamental interaction" of both realms in the vocation or calling (*Beruf*) of the Church. The activities of the Church in both realms are conceived activities of love. There are other Lutheran scholars who see a more close link between the ethical and the gospel witness of the church, who see "faith active in love seeking justice as a single unified vocation of the church". According to Gustaf Wingren, "It is the neighbour who stands at the center of Luther's ethic ... Vocation and the law benefits the neighbour, as does love born of faith ... Love born of faith and the Spirit effect a complete breakthrough of the boundary between the two kingdoms, the wall of partition between heaven and earth, as did God's incarnation of Christ" (Wingren 1957:46; Childs 1998:100). However, Lutheran theologians are particularly cautious not to confuse between the law and the gospel. Making the law into gospel secularises the Gospel making it unnecessary, making the gospel into law sentimentalises the law and thus reduces its usefulness (Benne 1998:24).

Robert Benne, a contemporary Lutheran theologian identifies four main themes that constitute Lutheran ethic in relation to public life: Salvation versus human effort; purpose of the church and its mission; rule of God through Law and Gospel; and the paradox of human nature and history (Benne 1998:17-27). Liberated from the worry about our salvation, we can concentrate upon the task of building a better world. Church's calling is to proclaim and gather a people around the Gospel, build them through the Spirit into the body of Christ remembering that it is not primarily a political actor, a social transformer or an aggressive interest group.

## 2. Major Themes in Calvin

### Decalogue supplementing Natural Law

Compared to Luther Calvin gives exceptional place to the divine law and to the Ten Commandments. Natural law provides the basis of morality: "Nothing is more common than for [human beings] to be sufficiently instructed in right conduct by natural law" (Calvin II. ii,

13,22 in White 1981: 187). Calvin viewed the Decalogue, supplementing natural law, as "the core of biblical ethic" (White 1981:187). For him the demand for the law are 'placed far above us, in order to convince us of our utter feebleness" (White 1981:188). He identified three uses of law: to admonish unrighteousness, disclose our iniquity and warn that the unrighteous will perish; to curb the unrighteous who have no regard for rectitude by dread of punishment, to keep the society safe for living; and, to enable the believers to learn the will of God and stimulate them with a "perfect pattern of righteousness", to point out the goal (Calvin II. vii, 6-13 in White 1981:188). In Calvinism the third use of the law serves as a foundation for greater ethical specification (Gustafson 1978:4).

Calvin's emphasis on the "third use" of the law is derived from his emphasis on sanctification of the believers (Gustafson 1978:11). In Calvin's third and principal use of the law the continuities with the Catholic tradition are stronger compared to Luther, as are similarities to the Anabaptists (Gustafson 1978:19). What distinguishes Calvin from the Catholic tradition is his use of Scripture as a basis for knowing the natural law. The Christian needs the law to be instructed and to overcome idleness. The law is to the flesh like a whip to an idle ass, to arouse it to work. Like the Anabaptists Calvin has conceived particular obligation for Christians - the sum of the Christian life being the denial of ourselves (Calvin 1:689-712). Unlike the Anabaptists Calvin saw Jesus as the "best interpreter" of the old law and not the giver of a new law. Moral law, according to Calvin, is written on the consciousness of all persons. Thus a biblically based ethics can be an ethics for all. In law humans confront the divine sovereignty.

### **Social Ethics of a sanctified society**

Calvin's social ethic was very appealing to the radical, intellectual, business people and industrialists. A.G. Dickens points out that Calvinism added a corporate dimension to Luther's rather individualistic religion. Unlike Luther Calvin could say, "Beyond the pale of the church no forgiveness, no salvation, can be hoped for ... abandonment of the church is fatal" (Calvin IV. 1.4 in White 1981:186). R. H. Tawney has summarized Calvinist ethics thus: "For the Calvinist, the world is ordained to show forth the majesty of God, and the duty of the Christian is to live for that end - [Christian's] task is to discipline [his or her]

individual life and to create a sanctified society (Tawney 1942:93). Calvin's ultimate text is "Thy will be done" and his ultimate spiritual act is "the assent of the will to an everlasting Lord" (Chadwick 1964: 93). The primacy Luther gives to faith, Calvin gives to discipline (Tawney 1942:98). "Disciplined obedience is the path towards the Christian's high elective destiny" (White 1981:198). Surrender of self-will or self-denial is the basis of all discipline. Self-discipline must be exercised towards others as well as to God. Towards others, by sobriety, righteousness, godliness, humility, respect, self-mortifying charity, agapic love, seeking always the good of the neighbours. Towards God, by resigning ourselves to the disposal of the Lord, letting God to tame the desire to possess wealth, intrigue for power, not contending for prosperity, success, recognition, apart from the blessing of God on which they should recline, letting God to conduct them to whatever lot God has ordained (Calvin III.vii). Charitable and contended self-denial is the secret of the strong Calvinist character, "placid and patient in enduring penury, ... moderate in enjoying abundance" (White 1981:199). Though Christian is free to enjoy all good things in life, he/ she should indulge as little as possible, curb luxury and cut off all show of superfluous abundance remembering that one is to give account of one's stewardship to God. Calvin is not advocating the proud Stoic indifference, but a humble waiting upon God in cheerfulness and faith, a self denial inseparable from bearing the cross of Christ. For Calvin, one does not deny self in order to become religious, but because one is already religious, saved, dedicated, and accepted through grace.

### **Human Freedom and Predestination**

Calvin understood human beings not in relation to the world, but in relation to God. The image of God in human beings is the proof of their predestination. Calvin's predestination is not a predetermination of all future events, but the exercise of special care over each of God's works. It does not take away human freedom, but stipulates that human freedom must be sought within the limits of human creatureliness. Opposition to God's will does not prove our freedom, but only shows that we are in bondage of sin. This means that we are unable to choose the truth voluntarily. Calvin in his commentary on Romans writes: "As long as we do not look beyond the earth, being quiet content with our own righteousness, wisdom and virtue, we flatter ourselves most sweetly,



and fancy ourselves all but demigods" (in Thomas 1995:26). Freedom that does not acknowledge its true being is not freedom but bondage. True freedom does not happen in one's imagination, but exists in relationships. It is the basis for "holiness" and "righteousness".

Freedom given by election and predestination is that of sons and daughters. This doctrine relieves us of all worry and care of ourselves, seeking freedom and salvation, relying on our strength, once we are confident of God's election. The blessing of the elect is not in any outward advantage or prosperity enjoyed in this life, but in their assurance of God's sufficiency and unfailing protection amid afflictions.

Predestination does not make us inactive or irresponsible. We do not know who are elected and not elected. It is known only to God. So all human beings are responsible for their actions as if there is no predestination. The purpose of the doctrine is to teach us to tremble at God's judgment and esteem God's mercy. According to Michael Walzer, a modern interpreter of Calvin, "the goal is holiness of life, to arouse and goad us eagerly to devote ourselves to the pursuit of good as the appointed goal of election" (Walzer 1969:23; Thomas 1995:27). There remains some ambiguity in Calvin regarding the relationship of predestination and human freedom which led Max Weber to see Calvinism as a source of capitalism and individualism, and Troeltsch to see the traits of both capitalism and socialism. Calvinism promoted the spirit of democracy and work ethic, holding one responsible for one's decisions, goading incessantly to struggle to fulfil one's destiny as a proof of a "sanctified life".

### 3. Radical Reformation Tradition

#### **Christ as the New Law and Complete Rejection of Natural Law**

In the Anabaptist tradition of the Radical Reformation, the person of Christ and his teachings became a "new law" for Christians. In the 1527 "Schleitheim Confession" of the Anabaptists, Christian community was to be a distinctive and disciplined group, called to radical obedience to Jesus as Lord. Radical obedience to Christ means non participation in certain "orders of creation", leading to pacifism and to the way of the cross (Gustafson 1978:15). The basis of authority is Christ himself, a complete rejection of the natural law tradition. Even the civil authority's

legitimacy is justified by biblical texts (Gustafson 1978: 16). New life in the Spirit demands conformity to a new law, law of Christ. Unlike in Calvin, this "new law" is discontinuous with the "old law". Third use of law is used to exhort and instruct as in Calvin, but different from Calvin, it becomes a pattern in the light of which judgments are possible about the moral correction of persons. While Calvin accepted the Lutheran accusatory and civic uses of law, the Anabaptists found no use for the natural moral law or the Decalogue (Gustafson 1978: 18).

### **Commonalities: Scripture and Tradition**

What is common to all Protestant ethical traditions is a return to Scripture directly and immediately (Gustafson 1978: 27). Bible is the mandatory source for knowing God as well as knowing the moral requirement of human life. Ethics like theology must confine itself to the biblical texts: it cannot take recourse to "tradition" nor is it corroborated by reason (Gustafson 1978:26). Luther's judgment that justification by grace and faith is central to the biblical theology had consequences for his understanding of the uses of moral law found in Scripture. Similarly, Calvin's "third use" of the law is placed as central to Scripture. The Anabaptist emphasis on being called to radical discipleship led to their way of using the Sermon on the Mount, leading to Pacifism. The Reformation principle, *sola scriptura* viewed Bible as the sole, or at least final source of authority. In the modern period, modern Protestants, belonging to the liberal, fundamentalist, and the neo-orthodox streams all grounded their ethics basically in Scripture. The Protestants generally consider tradition as an unhelpful guide to understand the Bible or Christian moral life. Biblical moral teachings in the context of its theology must be directly applied to a current moral issue. Hermeneutics, thus, becomes a crucial area in the use of scripture in making ethical decisions; and depending on it divergent ethical positions are possible in the Protestant ethical tradition. It has been said that Protestant ethical writings have "bent and stretched the principle of *sola scriptura*; they have gone beyond it ..." (Gustafson 1978:29). Theological ethics involves a process of interpreting how God acts in the Bible and in current events, a source of numerous subjective interpretation and ethical approaches.

In Lutheranism and Calvinism the emphasis on human sinfulness was greater than it was in Catholic theology, yet in Catholicism the

criteria for judging sins were clearer and more precise. Luther judged the human fault as more basic than immoral acts. Sin is ignoring God, despising God, lacking fear and trust in God, hating God's judgment and fleeing it, being angry with God, despairing God's grace, and trusting in temporal things. Sin in Protestant tradition is one of mistrust, rather than missing the mark, a religious problem, and not a moral one.

#### 4. New Trends in Protestant Ethics

In the 1960s the social movements associated with the idealism of the Enlightenment was in vogue. By the 1990s the focus has shifted to "culture wars". Subjective values gained momentum over the substance of a guiding moral vision, to the formation of character, to the sense of common good for which people are willing to sacrifice. Today's context is marked by ongoing critiques of Enlightenment-based influence and development (Bloomquist 1998:5). Three modern movements in Protestant ethics have been identified as attempts to overcome the colonization of ethics by the Kantian paradigm (Huetter 1998:38f).

First, the Barthian-Bonhoefferian movement in which God and God's commandments reemerged as a theme in close connection with Christian freedom. Barth attacked all forms of Kantian ethics in which human agents and their practical reason constitute the centre of the moral universe. Barth decentered the human being as the ethical subject and placed God at the centre of Christian ethics. Bonhoeffer's ethics, though affirming moral autonomy was clearly based on Christology.

Second, the rediscovery of Aristotle and Aquinas in the 1970s and 1980s. This movement placed character formation and virtues together with Christian freedom as central to Christian ethics. Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas stimulated a turn in philosophical and theological ethics that retrieves earlier Aristotelian emphases on virtue, character and habits (Hauerwas and McIntyre 1983; Bloomquist 1998:6). H. Richard Niebuhr also provides an example of preference to phenomenological approach over teleological or deontological methods. Niebuhr emphasises "response" or "responsiveness" as a universal characteristic of human nature. Hauerwas has emphasised character formation as he found it lacking in Protestant ethics. By character he means, "the qualification of [human] self agency through [human] beliefs, intentions, and actions, by which a [person] acquires a moral

history befitting [one's] nature as a self-determining being" (Hauerwas 1975:11). Paul Ramsey (*Basic Christian Ethics*, 1993), Gilbert Meilander (*The Theory and Practice of Virtue*, 1984) and Wybo J. Dondorp (*The Rehabilitation of Virtue*, 1994) were other leaders of this movement. Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder's *Politics of Jesus* is the most eloquent example of "biblical realism" in which fidelity to Jesus is the central moral principle, not rational concepts of justice or the common good. Freedom is here conceived to be concrete only in relation to particular virtues such as courage, or prudence. Freedom is opposed by particular vices like greed, pride or impatience.

Third movement focused on overcoming the abstract universalism by recontextualizing the moral agent. It rediscovered two theological foci: creation and God's economy of salvation. Larry Ramussen is in the forefront of this movement. He together with Cynthia Moe-Lobeda argue that the search for a fixed order can lead to idolatrous propensities "to close the circle and fix the universe (Rasmussen 1988:145). They point out the danger of static "orders of creation".

### Modern Critiques

Huetter criticizes the modern Protestant tendency to turn the doctrine of justification into a "systematic principle to govern and control every other element in Christian faith". "The fallacy of modern Protestant ethics is not that it insists on the centrality of the doctrine of justification by faith alone but that it regards this doctrine as a ceiling that has to cover everything instead of the very floor on which we stand" (Huetter 1998:33). It conceives law as the problem instead of the sinful humanity which is judged by the law.

Ramsey criticizes Protestant ethics as "wastelands of relativism". Protestant ethics, according to him, is not serious methodologically in assessing critically its sources. Themes such as loving, liberating or humanizing are "far too elastic" or "far too woolly", to provide clarity in determining the "good" implied in them, to predict the consequences, benefit or harm (Gustafson 1978:36. 43). To Ramsey clarifying one's methods and procedures, that is, to be able to give explicit, clear and articulate rational justification, is more important than having mere creative insight. In his deontological system of ethics certain acts are intrinsically evil and wrong even if the consequences would be of some



benefit (Gustafson 1978:35). He is quite wary of "situation ethics" advocated by Joseph Fletcher. Gustafson finds faults with Ramsey's concentration on methods and forgetting the theological and social implications of our actions (Gustafson 1978:33ff). At the same time he finds fault with the ethical procedures of the leading Protestant ethicists of the twentieth century like Barth, Richard Niebuhr, Tillich and Paul Lehmann. He characterizes their ethics as "intuitionism", though it is not determined by the anticipated consequences as in the case of Fletcher and Reinhold Niebuhr. The agent perceives by intuition of one sort or another, but not by rationality, on what action would be "fitting" to meet the need of the neighbour.

In Barth, the objective revelation of divine grace is the basis of moral judgments. In each moment God commands what is right to do. God as the primary moral agent decides what a human being ought to do. Gustafson perceives it as a sort of intuitionism, though Barth himself rejected that appellation. Gustafson regards Paul Tillich's ethics, though radically different from Barth's theology, as "equally intuitional at the level of practical moral choices" (Gustafson 1978:42). To Tillich, the will of God is manifest in our essential being. The moral demand then is to fulfil one's own nature (Tillich 1963:24-25). The moral aim is to preserve and actualise the created human potentialities. Tillich's view, according to Gustafson offers no "epistemological grounds" other than intuitive ones on which to settle conflicts or moral values or duties. Gustafson classifies Paul Lehmann's theonomous conscience as "the most intuitive of all" (Gustafson 1978:42). "The theonomous conscience is the conscience immediately sensitive to the freedom of God to do in the ever changing human situation what his(sic) humanizing aim and purposes require" (Lehmann 1963:358). The agent is sensitive to the freedom of God, a freedom limited only by confidence that God's action is always humanizing (Gustafson 1978:43). What God is doing in this world is known through biblically informed interpretation of events.

### **Moving Towards a God-Neighbour-Creation Ethics**

According to Luther there is human kinship "with all creatures". Human beings are embodied creatures, connected with rather than set over against the rest of creation. Hence it is necessary to move beyond an anthropocentric ethic. If our God-talk and theological framework begins and ends with human beings, our God would be "too small for a

fifteen-billion-year universe and our moral universe too quaint for words" (Rasmussen/Moe-Lobeda 1998: 135). H. Richard Niebuhr, sets the scope of moral responsibility to "all that participates in being". All that participates in being includes "elements and process that began eons before the arrival of humans as a species" (Rasmussen 198:135). Luther considered all creation as the "very abode of God". According to Rasmussen, "[a]ll nature, not just we, is fearfully and wonderfully made, and all of it masks and wraps God. God is truly and powerfully, in with and under all that is creaturely" (Rasmussen/Moe-Lobeda 1998:136). Divine majesty wholly present "in a grain, on a grain, over a grain, through a grain, within and without, and that, although it is a single Majesty, it nevertheless is entirely in each grain separately, no matter how immeasurably numerous these grains may be" (Luther 1883:32:234. 34-236.36, in Rasmussen Moe-Lobeda 1998:136). Because the transcendent power is present as divine power in all places, "nothing can be more truly present and within all creatures than God himself with his power" (Luther 1955:37, 55, in Rasmussen/Moe-Lobeda 1998:136). To Luther, Christ "must be, orally and bodily, in places and localities" (Rasmussen/Meo-Lobeda 1998: 138). Rasmussen argues that today we need a theology of creation that is different from "the one that effectively prevails in the global economy, where nature is little more than capital, resources, information, sink, and stage for a world in the effective hands of one species only" (Rasmussen/Meo-Lobeda 1988:141).

### **Conclusion: Strengths and weaknesses**

Protestant theology provides ethics with a looseness and openness which is responsive to modernity. In the life of faith and in the love of neighbour in faith, one knows what one ought to do, almost in an intuitive sense. Here Christian need not worry about the historical legacy of particularized moral teachings. The weakness of the Protestant ethics is that its authority is elusive. The main theological premise of Luther was that authentic Christian faith is not a matter of mind's assent to a series of doctrines but the trust of the heart in God's forgiveness in Christ. This liberates one from the "anxiety of attempting to lift oneself by one's own bootstraps to moral perfection into a new life of grace and freedom" (Beach 1988:13). Luther in his doctrine of *Beruf* or calling

asserted the priesthood of all believers, a call to Christians to become Christ to their neighbours.

In contrast to the philosophical ideal of autonomy, recent ethical approaches emphasize how human beings are embedded in a whole web of personal, social, economic, political, and ecological relationship. For example, Elizabeth Bettenhausen, a Lutheran ethicist, has connected Luther's view of "becoming the neighbour" with this relational constitution of the self (Bloomquist 1998:8). Relationality and moral freedom are not above history but are problems to be faced within structures or relationships. Today the tendency is to reject universal generalizations and to take seriously particularities that profoundly shape persons, their situations, and their moral agency in the world. For example, liberation theologies seek to correct modernity's distortions of rationality and moral judgment by emphasising praxis, by questioning massive suffering, and by pursuing serious social transformation.

Rasmussen points to our sinful tendency of using "our" inward-focused standards of normativity to objectify and judge those who are "other" from us. Faith does not confuse our "truths" with reality. According to Rasmussen, central to Lutheran ethical tradition is the call for neighbourly love which entails "putting on the neighbour", seeking to understand the other in all of her or his concreteness - and different from ourselves. "The heart turned-in-on-itself" is shattered open by the cross of Christ, as Luther emphasised (Rasmussen/Moe-Lobeda 1998:143). A theology of the cross cannot evade a theology of creation and a theology of creation requires a theology of the cross and resurrection near its centre. Lutheran emphasis on an "epistemology of the cross", writes Bloomquist (1988:7), "enables us to see and hear those who have been overlooked". God is not removed from actual suffering and death but enters fully into those concrete experience, to bring new life.

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# Challenges and Promises of Philosophical Ethics

**Tomy Paul Kakkattuthadathil**

This is an attempt at searching for a global ethic which is equally applicable to all peoples of all times and climes. Prefaced with a philosophical quest for the origin of moral consciousness, the discussion extends to Contemporary Search for a Common Ground in Ethics, Modern Challenges to Ethics and the Need of a Global Ethic today. Rev. Dr. Tomy Paul Kakkattuthadathil, a Ph. D. from Louvain is teaching Ethics, Cosmology, Political Philosophy and Methodology at Pontifical Institute, Aluva.

We are living in a culture in which science and technology controls every aspect of human life. The main scientific advances in the recent past undoubtedly give us a new vision of human life and of the world. Likewise they enable some major philosophical questions notably complexity, reality and rationality to be phrased better. The progress of science and technology has given us a new confidence: a confidence in the future, confidence in our own power, and confidence over nature. This confidence in science and in the power of reason elevated science into a prestigious position. The prestige of science enhanced so much that anything not scientific was undervalued. The consequence was that religious truths and ethical ideals were equated with out-dated prejudices.

In our culture there is a growing awareness among the people that our world is experiencing a serious crisis: a crisis of ethics. This crisis is in various fields such as economy, ecology politics, religion etc. At present world peace is threatened by arms-race, regional conflicts and continued injustices among peoples and nations. There is a lack of due respect for nature, and a progressive decline in the quality of life. This

situation promotes selfish mentality, disregard for others and dishonesty. Long cherished ethical principles are proved inadequate to cater to the needs of the people. Ethical ideals are sacrificed according to the whims and fancies of human beings. It is in such a situation we are searching for an ethical foundation that is objective and at the same time universal. Here is an attempt at searching for a global ethic, which is equally applicable to all people, all places and all times. For this purpose we begin with a historical search of the origin of moral consciousness. And we find that the quest for the universal principle in ethics is a fundamental quest of the human being. Our ethical task is to accept consciously the universal principles and norms accordingly.

### **History of Moral Consciousness**

In human history, the origin of ethics and moral consciousness cannot be explained in terms of physiology or physical necessity. Not even a single culture or civilization can have claim over the unique and absolute beginning of morality and moral life. In other words, the appearance of ethics and ethical life seems to be a curious phenomenon indeed. It is the result of a long process of rational development and evolution. When we search for the origin of morality, we will easily find that its roots are lost in the past. Morality was not at first the outcome of a conscious thought process: perhaps it was not even purely human in its origin. A study of the behaviour of animals throws much light upon the rudimentary forms of morality. In this manner we can even conclude that various conceptions of collective self-identity and justice, no doubt antedate 'civilization' by many centuries.

Among the subhuman social groups we find the rudiments of such social virtues as self-sacrifice, sympathy and co-operation. Communal life did not begin with human being himself: he merely expanded it and enriched it. We have descriptions of group life among elephants, pigeons, apes as well as of the elaborate social life of the ants and bees. Instances of self-sacrificing, devotion to offspring, of mutual helpfulness, and of loyalty to one's own group are common among subhuman social groups<sup>1</sup>.

In fact our morals are the result of long periods of development and of adaptation to changing environmental conditions. Therefore we cannot give an exact and specific beginning nor shall we be able to trace completely each step in the moral development of a particular race. What we can do at this moment is to point out the main stages and



characteristics of moral development. Moral theorists roughly draw the picture of moral developments in three different stages: instinctive, customary and reflective.

### **To be Human is to be Moral**

Ethics, in one form or another, has been a central issue for human-kind ever since people began to live together in small communities. Human beings never exist in isolation and no human being is an island. Every society needs a set of moral conventions simply in order to function as a community, because society is to him what soil is to the plant. If it were not for his social background, a human being would not be real human being capable of right and wrong actions. Aristotle said in his book entitled *Politics* the following: "He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a God"<sup>2</sup>.

The origin and development of morality is closely associated with the general development of social life and social institutions. With the growth of society, regulations expressed themselves outwardly in law and inwardly in conscience. As conflicts arose, men searched for standards of judgment and reflective criticism was born. Moral standards depend upon human beings' knowledge and intellectual and cultural development. In a sense, we can even say that the origin of moral consciousness forced the first humans to move from the instinctive level of morality to the levels of customary and reflective moralities.

The uniform ways of doing things by which human beings meet their common needs are called customs. Customs are passed from one generation to another by imitation and by precept. Customs ordinarily arise out of the needs of human life under specific conditions. The first demand of life is to continue to live. Human beings begin to live with acts, not with thoughts and theories, which emerge only later. Customs represent the funded experience of humans in the past. They save time and energy in that they are ready-made programmes of actions and adjustment. As an integrating force in the life of the group, they tend to promote satisfaction and moral goodness. Custom is one basis by which moral life of the person is sustained and developed.

Among the primitive groups the individual was almost completely submerged in the life and customs of the group. The group fixed the

rights and duties of a human being, and there was strong sense of social solidarity. In the course of moral development, it is observed that under complex social conditions one custom may conflict with another, customs may conflict with laws or one law may conflict with another law. Hence, it is not always clear what is the right course of action. For example, a human being's duty as a father may conflict with his duty as a soldier. Such conflicts forced human beings to search for some principle or standard of judgment. This search for an objective principle led the first humans to the origin of reflective morality. Accordingly human beings began to pass moral judgments on the basis of a reflective evaluation of principles and a careful examination of facts in their relation to human life. Thus various conceptions of collective self-identity and justice emerged in human history even before the origin of civilization. The growth of intelligence is an integral part of the development of morality. Moral life and intellectual life in this sense are more or less synonymous.

### **Philosophical Ethics and Hellenic Culture**

Ethics is first of all a vision, which shapes us as human beings, as persons able to take our responsibilities for our life with others and with the whole living world. Thus ethics is understood as a rational search for good life. In this sense, the story of ethics is the story of humanity's self-awareness and wonder with the world. It is both a collective and individual quest for true and original human life, i.e., good life itself. It is also a moral story, which unfolds in philosopher's thoughts and teachings throughout the ages, but it is also a story, which is expressed through the 'spirit of the times'. Thus the passage of the first humans from the level of 'beast man' to the level of 'wise man' is marked by the fundamental quest for goodness and good life. It is because of this fundamental quest the first humans came to be known as moral animals. Thus the central task of philosophical ethics is to articulate what constitutes moral life of a human being<sup>3</sup>. Ethics in this sense is primarily a search for good life and only secondarily a system of rules and norms.

In fact, ethics properly so-called is first met with the teaching of Socrates. Against the teaching of the sophists, he maintained that morality is knowledge of the Good through concepts. Morality issues forth from rational insight into the good. As reason is one and the same for all, so moral laws are universally valid. Hence, moral laws are not based on feelings and desires, but on rational thought. For him, the ultimate object

of human activity is happiness, and the necessary means to reach it, is virtue. When Socrates advises his followers 'know thyself' he wanted to tell that knowledge of human nature is important for good life. It is natural for a human being to seek good as part of realizing his earthly life.

Plato and Aristotle considered knowledge of ethical matters as essential for virtue. For Plato this knowledge was a metaphysical knowledge and he called it knowledge of 'ideas'. According to him, the world of ideas is really real world. And the knowledge of this world is the most perfect type of knowledge. At the same time, Plato accepted along with his Master that ethics is the highest and greatest study for a Philosopher<sup>4</sup>. According to him, *Summum Bonum* consists in the perfect imitation of God, the Absolute Good, an imitation, which cannot be fully realized in this life. He differed from his master Socrates on the point of virtue by saying that virtue did not consist in wisdom alone, but in justice, temperance and fortitude as well; these constituting the proper harmony of human activities.

Aristotle must be considered as the real founder of systematic ethics. He accepted in general the ethical position of both Socrates and Plato. At the same time, we have to keep in our mind that his *Nicomachean Ethics* is not a description of an ideal community as we observe in the *Republic* of Plato. In contrast to Plato, he chose to take facts concrete experience as his starting point. According to him, morality is an activity which is voluntary in its nature and for which men are praised or blamed, rewarded or punished. Hence, according to him voluntary actions alone may be called moral. Happiness is said to be the end of moral life. This happiness is attained by the performance of virtuous activities.

### **Ethics and Search for Objectivity**

The history of ethics may well be said to be the history of the changing notions of goodness. Any survey of the history of Western moral philosophy will make it abundantly clear that the definition of the good not only can change, but has changed significantly over the last two thousand years. From the very beginning of Greek philosophy itself we can trace the beginning of philosophical reflection on the nature of good life and right conduct. We find such an attempt to give an interpretation,

which is universally valid, with the hedonistic interpretation of good life. Though hedonistic turn in ethics began with Democritus<sup>5</sup>, pure hedonism began with Cyrenaics in Greek philosophy. The Cyrenaics held explicitly that a good action is one, which gives pleasure<sup>6</sup>. In the later Greek philosophy, Cyrenaics were followed by the Epicureans, who held that good things are those that satisfy our human desires, and particularly the desire for pleasure<sup>7</sup>.

The Enlightenment, in contrast, assumed that the good was ascertainable through the exercise of reason. Thus a complete revolution in ethics was introduced by Immanuel Kant. In his book, *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant proposes to explain the formal basis of moral judgment. A complete ethics would include material received from experience interpreted in the light of certain laws provided prior to experience from the resource of reason itself. Kant argued that moral good consisted in an *a priori* logic that was independent of outcome, i.e., that was not conditional<sup>8</sup>. Thus, from the wreck of pure theoretical reason Kant turned for rescue to practical reason in which he found an absolute, universal and categorical moral law. This law is not to be conceived, as an enactment of external authority, for this would be heteronomy, which is foreign to true morality. It is rather a law of our own reason, which is, therefore, autonomous, i.e., it must be observed for its own sake, without any regard to any pleasure or utility arising therefrom.

Evolutionary theory is another attempt to search for a universal basis for ethics. Evolutionary theory of ethics posited that the process of evolution explained not only the diversification of plant and animal life but also the 'advancement' of these life forms from simpler to more complex structures. First of all, it explained in a scientific and secular way the diversity of the natural world. Secondly, it ratified the notion that there was such a thing as real and physically verifiable progress. In this respect, Herbert Spencer is one of the prominent figures who sought to effect a compromise between altruism and egoism in accordance with the theory of evolution. In his opinion that conduct is good which serves to augment life and pleasure without any admixture of displeasure. According to Spencer the conditions for an ethics to be called universal are: prolongation of life, an increased amount of life, perhaps something like the 'more abundant' of the Gospel, and pleasure<sup>9</sup>.



## Contemporary Attempts for a Common Ground in Ethics

Contemporary European ethics in the broadest sense attempts to cover a generous range of philosophies running from phenomenology to theories of communicative action. The conditions of contemporary civilization forced philosophers to seek for a genuine ground for ethics and moral life. They found that many of the older mechanisms and traditional answers seem no longer entirely valid. The fact is that theoretical formulations lack the capacity to solve the problems of the modern man. Neither do they accord with the best methods and data, which a critical empirical science can provide. This environment was conducive to the emergence of new theories in ethics. The urgent need of new philosophical theories arises in this context. The crisis of human existence is a theme that recurs throughout the ethical theories of this age.

Paul Ricoeur in his book *Oneself as Another* shows that the desire for good life must undergo the test of the norm in terms of a moral judgment, if it is to confirm it as universally valuable and valid<sup>10</sup>. Levinasian declaration that 'ethics is first philosophy' is to be understood in the context of concrete human existence and reciprocal relation with the other. Along with this line Martin Buber also called for a change in the traditional ethics of 'is' and 'ought' to the level of ethical responsibility. Gabriel Marcel believed that ethical life must necessarily be intersubjective in its nature. The intersubjective relation of the self and the other is based on the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. Like Buber's I-Thou and Gabriel Marcel's *Co-esse* so also Martin Heidegger's *Mit-sein* (being-with) call for togetherness with others. Contemporary philosophy expresses this relationship of one with the other by asserting that existence is coexistence. By this we mean that ethics is fundamentally relational. It is in the context of the relationship between the self and the others that a person becomes an ethical person, both as the doer and the recipient of an ethical action.

Martin Buber believes that humaneness manifested as genuine friendship or togetherness and characterized by the symmetry of the I-Thou relationship is the highest stage of human nature and its fulfilment. Here existence is understood as the creative co-existence of I and Thou and the human becomes an ethical person through genuine encounter with the other. Therefore ethical responsibility for the other is the

fundamental criterion for becoming an ethical person. Gabriel Marcel arrives at the radical philosophy of I-Thou, which he understands also as an ethical relationship. Two expressions that are very characteristic of Marcelian ethics are: 'availability' and 'fidelity'. Marcel says that 'availability' is the ability to give one self to anything which offers and to bind one self by the gift<sup>11</sup>. A person who is available moves beyond himself. He is ready to consecrate himself to a cause, which continues to take him beyond him.

In contrast to the symmetrical ethical relation of Buber and Marcel, Emmanuel Levinas stands for an ethical relation, which is asymmetrical in its nature. The fundamental theme of Emmanuel Levinas is the phenomenological analysis of the appearance of the other<sup>12</sup>. Here the other is not a simple presence of a self to another self; it is not contained in a relation, which starts from a distance and culminates in being together. Rather, the other is an infinity irreducible even to the representation of infinity. The encounter with the other is an ethical experience in which one 'posits' oneself as morally responsible to the other. In this ethical relation the other approaches me from a dimension of height. It is, therefore, we say that ethical relation with the other is asymmetrical in its nature. In my encounter with the other, the other calls for my ethical response. In ethical terms, the other summons me to my obligations and judges me. It is before the other I discover myself unjust. Thus the other is bringing to me an awareness of my ethical responsibility and creates me a responsible person.

### **Modern Challenges to Ethics**

Early societies wrestled with many of the basic ethical issues that still confront modern societies. But they did not have to deal with nearly as many difficult ethical problems as do modern societies. As humanity's knowledge and technical abilities have increased the number of ethical issues that humanity must face has also increased. Along with the development of computer technology, for example, there have come knotty problems regarding the right to privacy, the use of robots rather than human workers, and appropriate attitudes of human beings toward artificially created intelligent beings.

There is a growing awareness among the people of our own day that world peace is threatened not only by arms race, regional conflicts and

continued injustices among peoples and nations, but also by a lack of due respect for nature, by the plundering of natural resources and by a progressive decline in the quality of life, and by the unequal distribution of wealth among peoples. This situation promotes selfish mentality, disregard for the other and dishonesty and it naturally leads to a crisis in the realm of ethics. We have already started experiencing this crisis on global and national levels. Hundreds of millions of human beings on our planet increasingly suffer from unemployment, poverty, hunger and the destruction of their families. Hope for a lasting peace among nations slips away from us. More and more countries are shaken by corruption in politics and business. It is increasingly difficult to live together peacefully in our cities because of social, racial and ethnic conflicts, organized crime and abuse of drugs. Our planet continues to be ruthlessly plundered. A collapse of eco-system threatens us. All these events point towards an imminent collapse of our moral system.

The most disquieting phenomenon in the area of ethics is the growth of what is called 'techno science'<sup>13</sup> whose functioning seems in the last analysis to escape all control. The moral challenge experienced through the applied sciences is presently known as crisis in technology. Technical science confers on humanity extraordinary powers, which have guaranteed progress, but at the same time, have brought out an extremely disquieting capacity for self-destruction. The developments in the realm of medical technology have made it possible to prolong human life with the help of machines. But this often generates complex bioethical issues: such as, Is it necessary to preserve biological life of human beings when it seems probable that they will be unable to live fruitful and rewarding lives? At this point, there is not even an agreement regarding how life and death are to be defined. Since genetics has become better understood, questions that early humans never had to face have arisen. Should women at advanced age be allowed to bear children by artificial means? Should society attempt to create superior animals or humans by means of genetic engineering?

More than ever, there is the need for ethical regulation to prevent humanity's power from turning to a curse. Clear-sighted scientists in touch with the dangers inherent in certain techniques are strongly demanding an in-depth study. The practice of science presents moralists and jurists with several new questions such as the status of the embryo,

experimentation on human beings, environmental questions etc. In a world, where all values have been relativised, and indeed undermined, the very idea of establishing ethical precautions is sometimes judged anachronistic and a disregard for freedom. Under pressure of events, there has again arisen the important question regarding the basis of ethics. Thus the disregard towards traditional values and ethical principles has created grave threats to human dignity and freedom.

### **The Need of this Hour: a Global Ethic**

We find in the modern world an enormous development in the fields of science and technology. At the same time, we also learn that science and technology function in our civilization as a power of destruction. It destroys the human feature of humanity. Here human destiny depends upon the role played by him in the drama of reason and its adventure. In this tragic situation, what we need is a global ethic. This means a fundamental consensus concerning binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes. Without a basic consensus over ethics any society is threatened sooner or later by chaos or dictatorship. There can be no better global order without a global ethic.

History of the hitherto existing humanity proves that Earth cannot be changed for the better unless we achieve a transformation in the consciousness of individuals and in public life. Each and every member of human society has intrinsic dignity and inalienable rights and every one has an inescapable responsibility for what s/he does and does not. Our moral traditions often offer very different bases of what is helpful and what is unhelpful for human being, what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad. Various religions provided us with different foundations for moral judgments. At the same time, we know that religions are helpless to solve environmental, economic, political and social problems of the Earth. But they can help humanity with spiritual renewal, i.e., a change in the inner orientation, the whole mentality, the 'hearts' of people and a conversion from a false path to a new orientation for life. Humanity urgently needs social and ecological reforms, but also spiritual renewal just as urgently.

Limitless exploitation of the natural foundations of life, ruthless destruction of the biosphere, and militarization of the cosmos are all outrages. As human beings we have a special responsibility for Earth



and the cosmos, for the air, water and soil. We have to live in harmony with nature and the cosmos. Any kind of outrage on nature will affect the welfare and happy life of human society. Selfishness with regard to the use of natural resources is a grave violation of our responsibility towards humanity and nature. Respect towards the other and towards nature is a necessary condition for a peaceful and happy life in the universe.

The growth of mass-media communication is having a profound effect on manners and morals. These instruments have been used by powerful groups to serve their special interests or to influence the attitude and thinking of the masses. Mass media is thus used for spreading ideological propaganda instead of accurate reporting, misinformation instead of information, cynical commercial interest instead of loyalty to truth. Those who work in the mass media have the obligation to respect human dignity, human rights and fundamental values. They have no right to intrude into individual's private spheres, to manipulate public opinion or to distort reality. We have learned that there is no global ethics without truthfulness and humaneness.

Presently our world is at the dawn of a new era, an era in which economic and political powers are being concentrated in the hands of a few countries and multinational corporations and within the countries, in the hands of a few people. This is the era of globalisation. In this new situation, nations are valued for their economic viability. Their ranking in the world community depends on the strength or weakness of their economy. The traditional custodians of moral values and good life turn to be powerless in this new situation. Success in life depends not only on good life and moral values but also on the economic and political power of the people and nation. This will promote definitely selfish mentality and unjust practices both on international and national levels. The globalisation of economy, technology and the media has also resulted in a globalisation of their problems. If there have to be solutions, there is the need for a globalization of ethics: no uniform ethical system, but a necessary minimum of shared ethical values, basic attitudes and criteria to which all regions, nations and interest groups can commit themselves. In other words, there is a need for a common basic human ethic. There can be no world order without a world ethic<sup>14</sup>.

Every human being without distinction of age, sex, race, color, physical or mental ability, language, religion, political view, or natural or social origin possesses an inalienable and untouchable dignity. Everyone is therefore obliged to honor this dignity and protect it. Humans must always be subjects of rights, must be ends, never mere means, never objects of commercialization and industrialization in economics, politics and media, in research institutes and industrial corporations. Every human being is obliged to behave in a genuinely human fashion: to do good and avoid evil. Humanity and all life on earth are crying for a voice, which will carry moral authority. This is an authority without which our laws can never exercise their mandated functions, for law depends in the final analysis on general consensus. We need to agree on at least this one self-evident truth that humanity will never progress humanly unless we all recognize that human rights can never exist without human responsibilities. They form two sides of one coin. It is the one and the only universal currency for true human exchange. It protects us from war, human exploitation, misery and economic disaster. At the same time it will strengthen human rights, human thinking and human happiness<sup>15</sup>.

### **The Ethical Task**

Today as in Socrates' time, the human is absent from him/herself. In the course of one's daily round one passes by oneself, brushes oneself in passing the way an anonymous pedestrian does another; but one does not encounter oneself. One lives in one's own vicinity, with oneself, but not very much of oneself. We live, act and think at the level of our outward appearance and our social personality, which is like a mask interposed between us and ourselves, between us and others. We live like a 'double' of ourselves rather than as our true self. Habit alienates us from ourselves, blind reflexes guide us. What is needed for the moment is revival.

One of the greatest achievements of ethical reflection in our time is the shift of emphasis from law-oriented perspective to a person-oriented perspective in defining the ultimate criterion for ethical judgment. This shift does not constitute a rupture in our ethical tradition but rather a refinement. From very early period onwards there were many attempts in different epochs to ground ethics on a universal basis. Philosophers who belong to the different schools of philosophy sought after a universal

solution for judging human actions as right or wrong. Most of them proved to be insufficient to provide insight into the "way things should be". We learned these difficult lessons through the experience of war, propaganda, pollution, manipulation, cyber crimes and different kinds of exploitation. "Man's inhumanity to man" could not be corrected by our scientific knowledge of the natural world.

The foundation of ethical judgment must be as broad as possible so that it must be applicable to everywhere in the universe. We accept the criterion of the human person as the source of 'objectivity' something that is beyond subjectivism and wishful thinking. In order to have this criterion function, however, the concept of person that we invoke must lie outside the realm of individual and social manipulation. The concept of person to which one may appeal is not my concept, our concept, nor even some concept that has been formulated by others. Rather, it is a basis for appeal, invoked to substantiate an ethical claim that reasonable persons will be able to recognize as valid. This appeal does not prove any argument, it merely invites agreement.

Thus we see that the most basic fundamental criterion for ethical reflection cannot be proven, verified or even self-fulfilling. It can only be believed, because although the nature of that criterion is available through our human experience, it is a reality, which we seek or propose to fulfill a critical role in our experience itself, must be outside the confines of any fixed definition. The universally available foundation should be free from all sorts of manipulation and totalization. It cannot be a subject matter of any kind of experimentation but can only be lived through our own daily lives.

## Conclusion

Throughout human history from the time of Socrates to our own modern era the human race has sought answers to the most fundamental question of human life. The area of philosophy traditionally known as 'ethics' is the attempt to arrive at an understanding of the nature of human values, of how we ought to live, and of what constitutes right human conduct. Great philosophers of human history sought after different solutions for arriving at a universal notion of good life in accordance with the need of the time. What we were searching for was an objective ground for our ethical ideals, which has a universal application to all cultures, nations, and human beings. Today what we are definitely in

need of is a global ethics. This means a fundamental consensus concerning binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes.

The dissolution of the concept of the human person in his concrete situation has found room in our period and has frightening consequences on the political and social plane. A great number of contemporary philosophers have given considerable attention to the discussion of the human person so as to make his dignity and value evident. As a result the domain of ethics is to be extended as far as the limits of the world. The pious intentions of the moral philosopher must include not only the difficulties of the neighbor, the death of the fellow-citizens, but furthermore the seasonal problems of foreign population, the lack of food, cruelty on people that we did not know but that we see dying, unemployment etc. The situation of a moral being has acquired strange qualities. He is able to understand the changes and sufferings taking place in the different parts of the world. Thus we can even say with the famous German poet Novalis that philosophy is really a nostalgia, homesickness, a pulsation to be at home everywhere in the universe. In the age of reason nobody is considered a stranger. Thus our present day ethical task is to live with other human beings a life, which is truly good and meaningful.

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### Foot Notes

1. Animals are mainly guided by natural impulses and instincts in all their dealings. They are not conscious about the ends of their activities. Cf. H. Titus, *Ethics for Today*, New Delhi, Eurasia Publishers, 1966. pp. 16-17.
2. Aristotle, *Politics*, Bk.I, Chapter 2, 1280 b 10.
3. It is important to remember here that philosophical ethics is not independent of other areas of philosophy. The answers to many ethical questions depend on answers to questions in metaphysics and other areas. Furthermore, philosophers have been concerned to establish links between the moral life and other spheres of human life.



4. Plato, *Republic*, Bk. VI.504, 505, 509 a, b.
5. Democritus understands hedonism as a perpetually joyous and cheerful disposition, which is also the highest good, and happiness of man. According to him the greatest possible pleasure is the end and supreme good of human endeavor. When we come to the period of Plato, he had in mind a kind of supernatural ideal, which is reflected in some varying extent in the material world. This ideal was perceptible for Plato only through a burst of intuition.
6. The Cynics, on the other hand, held that the good life consisted in being independent of human desires and their satisfaction, so that for them pleasure had no connection with goodness. Cf. W. Lillie, *An Introduction to Ethics*, Delhi, Allied Publishers, 1986, pp. 94-95.
7. This is the fundamental view of the ethical theory of Utilitarianism of modern period.
8. Kant believes that all moral concepts have their seat in reason prior to all data of experience. Natural events always occur according to laws; only rational beings, however, act according to conceptions of laws. This implies a peculiar and distinctive ability in man. Cf. I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Writings*, Tr. by L. W. Beck, Chicago, University Press, 1949, p. 72.
9. W. Lillie, *An Introduction to Ethics*, pp. 184-185.
10. Paul Ricoeur, *Soi mene Comme un autre*, Paris, Edition du Seuil, 1990, pp. 28f.
11. Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, Tr. by Robert Rosthal, New York, Cross Road, 1982, p. 40: I am opening an unlimited credit account in your name, you can do what you want with me, I give myself to you. This does not mean, at least in principle, I am your slave; on the contrary, I freely put myself in your hands.
12. E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhof, 1961, p.40.
13. By techno sciences we mean those pure sciences with their application in different areas of human life.
14. H. Kung and H. Schmidt, *A Global Ethic and Global Responsibilities*, London, SCM Press, 1998, p. 105.
15. H. Kung and H. Schmidt, *A Global Ethics and Global Responsibilities*, p. vii-viii.

# **“Walking in Newness of Life” (Rom 6:4)**

## **Foundations of Pauline Ethics**

**Jacob Prasad**

This is an attempt at bringing out the basic orientations of St. Paul with regard to Christian Ethics. In all Pauline letters there is a mingling of doctrine and advice. Paul bases his exhortations (the imperative) on God's salvific action for humankind (the indicative): "For freedom Christ has set us free (Indicative). Therefore stand firm and do not submit... to slavery" (Imperative). Expositions of Christian freedom, Love as fulfilment of Law and Freedom and Love follow. Rev. Dr. Jacob Prasad teaches Sacred Scripture at the Pontifical Institute, Aluva.

St. Paul, creator of apostolic letter writing praxis, wrote letters to the first Christians for communicating to them the fundamental truths of his teaching and also for exhorting them to upright conduct. The central concern, indeed, of Paul in drafting these first New Testament documents was not to keep a record of his teaching but to transform the behaviour of the recipients.<sup>1</sup> Yet Paul was not a systematic moralist any more than a systematic theologian.<sup>2</sup> Even as a letter writer his basic interest was not to produce systematic treatises of his thought. He sought to handle concrete problems by his letters, in which he developed certain topics and exhorted his churches to the practice of a more intense Christian life.<sup>3</sup> Paul's letters are therefore both doctrinal and ethical writings, doctrine being what Christians believe and ethics as to how they behave.<sup>4</sup> To speak, however, of Paul's ethics here does not mean to draw out his opinion about modern questions like vitro fertilisation, organ transplantation, animal rights, nuclear debate, human cloning and so on, although these would certainly come within the fundamental

principles which Paul enunciates. Our attempt here is to bring out the basic orientations of Paul with regard to Christian ethics.

### 1. Preliminary Observations

In our attempt at understanding the founding principles of Paul's ethics we should keep in mind a few preliminary things which will circumscribe our research. First of all, since the authorship of certain letters in the New Testament bearing Paul's name continues to be debated, it is at present common for studies of Paul's theology or ethics to include only the undisputed letters, viz., Rom, 1 and 2 Cor, Gal, Phil, 1 Thess and Philm.

Further in all Paul's letters both teaching and advice are presented - a mingling of doctrine and exhortation. In 1 Thess, for instance, Paul exhorts his converts to lead a life pleasing to God (4:1-12) which is followed by the teaching about the parousia (4:13-5,11) and then again by exhortation (5:12-22). In 1 Cor together with the doctrinal responses to the questions which the Corinthians had put before him (*peri de hōn egrapsate*, "now concerning the matters about which you wrote" 7:1; cf. 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1) Paul advises them about the way in which they should behave. Some of the letters include, in the general discussion of doctrine and exhortations, ethical lists, catalogues of virtues and vices (Gal 5: 19-23; 1 Cor 5: 10-11; 6: 9-10; 2 Cor 6: 6-7; 12:20; Rom 1: 29-31; 13:13; Phil 4: 8-9).<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, if one surveys the letters of Paul, it becomes quickly evident that at least half of what the apostle wrote consists of words of advice and exhortation concerning right conduct. Obviously, exhortation is not merely an appendix or addition to the Gospel entrusted to Paul, but a definite part of it.<sup>6</sup>

However, among the undisputed letters, it is in Gal (5:13-6,10) and Rom (12:1-15,13) that we find clearly marked off paraenetic sections following the doctrinal expositions.<sup>7</sup> We would then focus our attention more on Gal and Rom in our attempt to draw out the foundations of Christian ethics as propounded by Paul.

The Galatian Christians were of Gentile origin (4:8: 5:2-3; 6:12-13). Paul had founded the Church during his first missionary journey (Acts 16:6) and then visited them once again (Acts 18:23). The Gospel that he preached was that all are saved by the cross of Christ as his grace; each appropriates it through faith. Soon after Paul had left Galatia, "judaizing"

Christians came there; they insisted that in order to be truly Christian, one has to be circumcised and must keep the Mosaic Law necessarily for salvation. They judged the Gospel preached by Paul to be partial, and even questioned his authority. Therefore, in the letter Paul makes a vigorous defence of his apostolic authority and the validity of his teaching (cc.1-2). There follows an exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith alone (cc.3-4). Then lest someone should think that doctrine leads to a life of indifference to the moral code, Paul concludes with certain practical applications of his teaching.<sup>8</sup>

Writing to Romans Paul took the occasion to summarise his theology in a somewhat systematic fashion. He felt the need for this summary for a number of reasons. First, since he did not found the church in Rome yet intended to visit it, the letter served as a way to introduce himself. Second, the apostle realised the need to explain himself against the hostile rumours circulated about him (cf. Rom 3:5-8; 6:1). Third, because he knew that dangers awaited him in Jerusalem (Rom 15:30-32), he probably wanted the influential church in Rome to put in a word in favour of him before the mother church in Judea, which was instrumental in founding the Church in Rome. The main thesis of the letter is stated in 1:16-17. The point of Paul's argument as a whole is to explain the reasons why he refuses to be ashamed of the Gospel as he has been preaching it, and why his Gospel is God's power achieving salvation for every believer, Jew or Greek. Paul bases the entire argument running from 1:18-11:36 on the doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ. As a consequence, Paul conceives of ethics in Rom 12:1-15,13 as the human response to God's merciful deeds in the history of salvation, as presented in the foregoing chapters.<sup>9</sup>

## **2. The Indicative and the Imperative**

The close connection, as indicated above, between the doctrinal part of the letters and the practical part brings out the logic of Paul's ethics. Paul founds his moral exhortations (the imperative) on the basis of God's prior action on behalf of believers in Christ (the indicative). The close connection between the indicative and the imperative can well be seen even within the ambit of single verses too: Gal 5:1 - "For freedom Christ has set us free (indicative). Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery (imperative)"; Gal 5: 25 - "If we live by the Spirit (indicative) let us also walk by the Spirit (imperative)"; Rom 12:1



– “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God (indicative), to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (imperative).” 1 Cor 5:7- “Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch (imperative), as you are really unleavened (indicative)”.

It was R. Bultmann, in 1924, who identified the relation between, indicative and imperative as the basic structure of Paul’s ethic.<sup>10</sup> The fact that the imperative rests on the indicative is evident even in Paul’s manner of expression. Paul uses the same verb for exhortation as he does for the preaching of the Gospel, namely, *parakalein* (cf. 2 Cor 5:20 and 6:1 with Rom 12:1 or 1 Thess 2: 12 with 4:1). According to the context its meaning is “to call in”, “to invite”, “summon”, “to exhort”, “to request”, “to encourage”, or “to comfort”.<sup>11</sup> In the same way the cognate noun *paraklēsis* is used by Paul both for preaching and proclamation and for exhortation (cf. 1 Thess 2:3 with 1 Cor 14:3 and Phil.2:1). It means “encouragement”, “exhortation”, “appeal”, “request”, “consolation”, or “comfort”.<sup>12</sup> Strangely enough the verb frequently used in Greek rhetoric for exhortative speech, *paraineō* and its cognate noun *parainesis*, from which comes the lone-word “paraenesis”, frequently used in the discussion of Pauline ethics, is not found in Paul’s letters. Therefore Paul’s kind of exhortation is indeed *paraklēsis* in that it is both a request and an exhortation, an invitation to a new obedience and summons which for Paul belongs to the Gospel.<sup>13</sup> In common terms the relation between the indicative and the imperative would sound like the maxim of Pindar, “become what you are”,<sup>14</sup> which becomes explicit in some of Paul’s statements: Phil 1:27 – “Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”; 1 Thess 5:8 - “But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation”. “What is meant is that the new life in its moral manifestation is at one time proclaimed and posited as the fruit of the redemptive work of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit - the indicative; elsewhere, however, it is put with no less force as a categorical command – the imperative.”<sup>15</sup>

### 3. A Crux Interpretum

Even as we say that the Pauline imperatives are based on the indicatives there remains the question as to why there should be imperatives at all. For according to the indicatives of Paul, the believer who has been justified by faith has already obtained his freedom from

Law, Sin and flesh. But at the same time in the imperatives Paul proposes to them the observance of the precepts of the Decalogue, which belongs to the Law. He says "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom 13:8-10); "... become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'" (Gal 5:13-14). Further, if the believer has obtained freedom from Law, Paul contends that he is governed now by "the law of faith" (Rom 3:27), "the law of the Spirit" (Rom 8:2) and "the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2). Then how should one understand the "law" (*nomos*) in these phrases?<sup>16</sup> What is the difference between the "law" in these phrases and the "Law" from which the justified one is said to have been liberated? Understanding these would entail understanding what it means for the Christians to be freed from Law, Sin and flesh, for the Christian behaviour is informed by these facts.

#### 4. Christian Freedom

##### *a. From the Law*

Both in the letter to the Romans and the Galatians Paul proclaims the Christian's freedom from the Mosaic Law. Paul's attitude towards the Law is really very complicated. In Galatians he writes about the Law in a polemical and negative manner while in Romans he is far less polemical and negative about it.<sup>17</sup> Positively, "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (Rom 7:12); "spiritual" (Rom 7:14); and "good" (Rom 7:16). Yet this God-given gift was incapable of giving life (cf. Rom 8:3) because it was an external norm, a list of do's and don't's possessing in itself no life-giving force.<sup>18</sup> According to Galatians the Law itself had, therefore become a curse to the ones under it, for the very Law said "Cursed be everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the Law" (Gal 3:10 quoting Deut 27:26). What is implied is that everyone under the Law is under this curse since no one perfectly fulfils all of the prescriptions (613 individual commandments, according to Rabbinic enumeration) of the Mosaic Torah. As a solution to this human predicament Paul,

employing Deut 21:23, argues that the purpose of Christ's death was to free us from the curse of the Law. Since all those under the Law are under a curse, Christ came to do what they could not do by legal observance. Dying upon a cross ("hung from a tree"), he assumed the curse of the Law on behalf of humanity.<sup>19</sup> In Romans, however, Paul's solution for the anomaly created by the Law is to substitute for obedience to it faith in Christ Jesus "who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25). In effect, human beings "have died to the law through the body of Christ" (Rom 7:4), that is, through the crucified body of Christ.<sup>20</sup>

#### b. *From Sin*

Paul speaks of another freedom in the life of the Christian, namely, freedom from Sin (*hamartia*). According to Paul, in the period before Christ, human beings were all sinners, who in spite of their efforts to live uprightly did not achieve that goal or the destiny intended by the creator for them; they failed "to hit the mark", as the basic meaning of *hamartanein*, "to sin", implies (Rom 3:23).<sup>21</sup> In Paul's view, before Christ human beings were under the "power of sin" (Rom 3:9-20) – a personified power. " 'Sin' is the term Paul uses for a compulsion or constraint which humans generally experience within themselves or in their social context, a compulsion towards attitudes and actions not always of their willing or approving... In particular, sin is that power which makes human beings forget their creatureliness and dependence on God, that power which prevents humankind from recognising its true nature, which deceives the *adam* into thinking he is godlike and makes him unable to grasp that he is but *adamah* [earth, ground]".<sup>22</sup> Christ has set free human beings from Sin. In Rom 6 Paul speaks of the Christian's participation in the death of Christ in the baptismal union. The death that Christ died was a death to Sin, once for all. His death in perfect obedience to the Father's will and in total self-surrender meant a complete rout of Sin in a decisive engagement.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly Paul concludes, "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and that we might no longer be enslaved to sin" (Rom 6:6).

#### c. *From the Flesh*

We saw above that the Law though "good", "holy" and "spiritual" could not produce the intended result when it met with the human person

on whom it was incumbent. In Romans Paul explains this anomaly by ascribing the inability of *anthrōpos* to obey the Law to its carnal/fleshy condition: "For I know that the law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into slavery under sin" (7:14). "Flesh" in its very characteristic sense in Romans designates "human existence as weak, mortal, self-centred, prone to sin, hostile to God. To be 'in flesh' in this sense is to be determined by the sinful conditions of the old era initiated and symbolised by Adam."<sup>24</sup> The Christ-event has set the believer free even from this weak nature of the flesh.

### 5. The Law of the Spirit

Freed from the devastating power of the Law and Sin and the incapacitating character of the flesh, the Christian is positively governed by the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2). The first genitive ("of the Spirit") in this phrase is to be taken as epexegetic ("the law which consists in the Spirit")<sup>25</sup>; the second ("of life") as qualitative ("leading to [eternal] life").<sup>26</sup> There has been considerable discussion with regard to the understanding of this "law of the Spirit" and for that matter together with it the other two phrases "the law of faith" and "the law of Christ". Some have understood law in these phrases as the very Mosaic Law itself purified of hindrances and defects and restored to its pristine character of holy, just and good and thus enabled to attain its intended end. For instance, V.P. Furnish thinks that both "the law of the Spirit of life" and "the law of Christ" refer to "the sum and substance of the law of Moses".<sup>27</sup> E. Lohse similarly refers to the three "law of" phrases in terms of "the original significance of Torah" enabling the law "once again [to] serve its original purpose of testifying to the 'holy, just and good will of God' (Rom 7:12)."<sup>28</sup> W. Schrage also takes "the law of Christ" as referring in some way to the Torah.<sup>29</sup> Likewise Dunn argues that all the three phrases are referring to the Law of Moses, as fulfilled in the Spirit<sup>30</sup>. However, as Byrne points out, "in view of such statements as [Rom] 7:4 and 7:6; it is very hard to see how Paul could conceive of the Mosaic Law not just as undergoing a transformation in the new era, but as the very *agent* of liberation."<sup>31</sup> Moreover in Gal 5:18 Paul declares categorically, "if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under Law". The Christian life is characterised by the gift of the Spirit and therefore is not shut up within the old system of the Law. In Gal 5:23 after having described the fruits of the Spirit Paul observes that the



Law has nothing to say against the attitudes which the Spirit produces in the Christian existence: "Against such things there is no Law".

"The law of faith" or "the law of the Spirit of life" or "the law of Christ" are not "laws" at all in the strict sense of the word. Paul does not mean by those phrases another set of laws or a code of law substituting the Mosaic Law. It is not a code of law, which if observed will guarantee salvation, as was presumed, although falsely, of the Mosaic Law. "Law" in these phrases implies rather an orientation from within, an inner source of spiritual energy and not a set of rules imposed from without. As Fitzmyer puts it, "The Christian who has been baptized into Christ lives a new life, a symbiosis of himself with Christ. Having grown together with Christ, the Christian can only think as Christ thinks and conduct his life only for God. 'I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me' (Gal 2:20).

## 6. Love Fulfills the Law

We saw above that the Christian who is justified and living in the new era is governed by the 'law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' (Rom 8:2). Having made this assertion, Paul when he comes to the paraenetic section expatiates it by commanding his Christians to practise virtues. He includes even catalogues of virtues and vices, as we mentioned earlier. More succinctly he tries to bring all his commands under one notion: that of love of others. To the Galatians Paul says, "... through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Gal 5:13-14). And to the Romans he writes: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law" (13:8-10). This pericope in Romans resumes and completes the exhortation begun in 12:9. "Let love be genuine". Thus the theme of love brackets the entire section of the paraenesis, 12:9-13:10, including the otherwise intrusive passage on obedience to civil authorities.<sup>32</sup> In a way Paul enunciates love as the basic principle of Christian conduct and relationships. In the second part of the paraenesis in Romans (14:1-15,13) this principle of love is applied to a concrete

situation; needless to say Paul is not involving in casuistry. In this context, Paul makes it clear that for himself there is no use either for sabbatarianism or vegetarianism. Such interests are the signs of a man of weak faith, who has not properly understood the liberty of the Spirit. But such a person is not to be treated with contempt or suspicion by the community. He should not feel that his fellow-believers are passing judgment upon him. At the same time the community also has a right to expect of him that he will not criticise those who take a liberal view. The emerging principle is that Paul is not clamouring for consensus and uniformity in behaviour, but allows differences provided that each person acts with integrity before God and in the spirit of love.<sup>33</sup>

Yet it is quite surprising and apparently contradictory that Paul who had deprived the Christians of any ties with the Law now advises them to the practice of love and commends it as the summation and fulfilment of the Law. A deeper perception, however, will show that there is no contradiction. It would have been contradictory if Paul had said that the Christians are obliged to follow the system of the Law and that such an observance is the basis of their relationship to God. Paul does not say anything of the kind. The words of Paul do not favour the system of the Law, but go against it. He suggests that it is enough to have the sole precept of love of neighbour; it is not necessary to have the whole system of multiple rules. But at the same time Paul does not also say that the keeping of this unique precept is the basis of the relationship with God. The basis of such a relationship is faith, through which one receives the Spirit and the Spirit produces love in the believer. Love, therefore, is not another commandment, the keeping of which will render the human person just before God, but the divine life in the human person made possible through faith (cf. Gal 5:6-22). Love is the fulfilment of the Law, not because it replaces the Mosaic Law with another norm of conduct, but because it is itself a dynamic force which impels human beings to seek the good of others, manifesting their faith in Christ (Gal 5:6: *pistis di' agapēs energoumenē*, "faith expressing itself through love").<sup>34</sup>

Yet in the light of the central thesis of the letter to Romans (3:21-4:25 and 7:1-8:4) that the believers are essentially removed from the law one might well ask why Paul brings in Rom 13:8-10 the idea that the Law is something to be fulfilled. We may have to say that for Paul

the central *values* of the law, as distinct from the more ritual prescriptions (circumcision, dietary laws, Sabbath and feasts) remained in force for the believers, although Paul does not explicitly say so. That is the reason why Paul lists the four commandments of the "Second Table" of the Decalogue in Rom 13: 9 and tells of them as ingrained in the single injunction taken from the Book of Leviticus (19:18), "You shall love your neighbour as yourself". Rather than a distinction "within" the content of the Law, what is probably implicit here is a distinction between what the law prescribes *as law* and the values which it enshrines as an expression of God's will for human beings in an ethical sense. For believers these do not impose themselves as a law from without. Rather they are fulfilled within believers through the indwelling of the Spirit (Rom 8:4. 9-11) in realisation of the promises of the eschatological age contained in Jer 31:33 and Ezek 36:26.<sup>35</sup>

## 7. Liberty and Love

Having been freed from the Law and being governed by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which in reality is not a code of law, there exists for Christians the temptation of turning their liberty into license. Therefore Paul warns in Gal 5:13: "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves of one another". The effective controlling factor that Paul proposes against the danger of freedom serving as a cloak for selfish and self-seeking ends and liberty degenerating into license is love, defined simply as the concern to serve one another.<sup>36</sup> But the advice given to those who are now free to become "slaves" is apparently strange. In Rom 6:18.22 too Paul says that the believers have become free but at the same time they are slaves. Slavery in these contexts has to be understood in a nuanced manner. Being motivated by and undertaken on account of love this *douleuein* ("to be a slave", "to serve") is not an external oppression which takes away the dignity of the person, but on the contrary is a free commitment which honours the person and promotes the best interest of the person at the level of the spirit. Furthermore, the complement in the command to become slaves "to one another" deprives it of every aspect of oppression or domination. In a reciprocal *douleuein* there is no particular master or slave, but all are slaves and in a sense all are masters too. Paul's formula, therefore, expresses a profound transformation in personal relationship, a kind of paradoxical

transformation in which everybody attains full dignity and true freedom, renouncing the idea of self-centred liberty.<sup>37</sup>

### 8. Virtues and Vices

It was observed above that Paul in his paraenesis included also catalogues of virtues to be practised and vices to be avoided. These lists have been compared with similar ones which are seen in Hellenistic philosophical writings, especially Stoic, and in Palestinian Jewish texts (e.g., IQS 4:2-6, 9-11).<sup>38</sup> More precisely, most of what is in the list of Rom 13:13 would have been widely censured. Paul's recommendation of "self control" (*enkrateia*) (Gal 5:22) is found in Greek philosophical ethics.<sup>39</sup> The abhorrence of idolatry is typically Jewish (e.g., Isa 44: 9-20).<sup>40</sup> His condemnation of homosexual acts uses the Stoic criterion on what is "fitting" while the condemnation itself is Jewish (Gen 19:1-28; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Deut 23:18; Isa 1: 9-10; 3:9; Jer 23:14; Ezek 16:43-58).<sup>41</sup> What is distinctively Christian is the exaltation of love in 1 Cor 13 and the high regard for "humility" (Phil 2:3; Col 3: 12), for the Greeks considered 'humility' as related to servility.<sup>42</sup>

The similarity shows that the sort of moral concern that Paul demonstrates in these were also typical of those elsewhere concerned for ethical probity and moral restraint. Paul had therefore no hesitation in aligning himself with the wisdom of peoples and previous generations. Much of Paul's specifications in ethical teaching, then drew on traditional wisdom, which means that he would have been sufficiently confident of a well-developed sense of right and wrong in the societies in which he mingled. At the same time, by setting love so prominently in his ethical teaching in view of "the of law of Christ" he also modified what he had taken from his Jewish and Graeco-Roman background.<sup>43</sup>

Yet another factor ought to be noted in Paul's presentation of the opposition between flesh and the Spirit in his paraenesis in Gal 15:16-22. There is a difference in the effects between the two. For flesh Paul lists a set of "works" (*erga*): sins with respect to sexuality, religion, social relations and temperance. As regards the Spirit, Paul does not speak of "works" but of "fruit" (*karpos*) and that in the singular. The word "fruit" implies a profound fecundity rather than an external activity and fecundity implies a vital union in love. Further, from the nature of these effects it is evident how much superior and stronger the Spirit is over the flesh. This superiority of the Spirit is obvious in the exhortation



in Gal 5:16: "Live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh".<sup>44</sup> What Paul means is that if they follow the Spirit they will not run the risk of falling prey to the desires of the flesh. Paul does not merely want to say that he who chooses one naturally avoids the other, but that the Spirit is more powerful and gives victory over the flesh. Therefore, the Christian attitude and outlook in moral life ought not to be merely negative but positive. The good strategy consists not in being worried about the falls, a worry which is depressing and which can consequently increase the falls, but consists in putting in positive efforts to be docile to the impulses of the Spirit. The one who is docile to the Spirit wins over temptations without even thinking of them (cf. 1 John 4:4).<sup>45</sup>

## 9. Conclusion

Rom 12: 1-2 which stands out as a caption for the paraenetic part of the letter summarises in a way the foundations, orientations and principles of Pauline ethics. It is based on the "mercies of God" (12:1) of which Paul has spoken in the preceding chapters of the letter.<sup>46</sup> The Pauline indicative that the believer has been set free from the Law, Sin and flesh is because of the 'mercies of God', which has found its definitive and climactic expression in the Christ-event, in which "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). The Christian, consequently, is governed by the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2). This law is a law from within, an impulse from within, and the one who executes the demands of this law acts, not conforming to the world but transformed with the renewal of his mind (Rom 12:2). With this renewed inner faculty the Christian is able "to discern the will of God" (Rom 12:2). The Christian has to constantly search for the will of God, for what is "good acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2). This law, that is set in the heart of the believer, is not a legal codification, in contrast with the Mosaic Law. It is not a system of mere do's and don't's. It is quite confident and positive in its approach, for it professes the inner capability of the one commanded to execute what is expected. Hence the imperative becomes a touchstone of the indicative. Since the incumbent of imperatives in Paul stands justified by the initial act of faith and awaits the eschatological act of salvation, he acts in hope, knowing that the day of judgment is drawing nigh. As such this law fulfils the old law, for it is the summation and fulfilment of the law of love of neighbour of the Old Testament (Lev.

19:18). In its specifications, that is, in the specific admonitions to shun vices and practise virtues, it draws both on the Graeco-Roman and Jewish world, although more readily from the latter; that shows its basic appreciation of the wisdom of peoples and previous generations; at the same time even these have to be qualified by the Christ-event. The Pauline ethics, the walking in the newness of life, therefore, is a living in Christ, energised by the Spirit, seeking to do the will of God.

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### Foot Notes

- 1 B.S. Rosner, " 'That Pattern of Teaching' : Issues and Essays in Pauline Ethics", *Understanding Paul's Ethics. Twentieth Century Approaches* (ed. ID) (Grand Rapids, MI 1995) 1.
- 2 C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle to Paul to the Romans* (London 1959) 197.
- 3 J.A. Fitzmyer, "Pauline Theology", *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed. R.E. Brown - J.A. Fitzmyer - R.E. Murphy) (London 1991) 1383.
- 4 Cf. Rosner, "That Pattern of Teaching", 4.
- 5 Such ethical lists are seen in the disputed letters too: Col 3:5-8. 12-14; Eph 5: 3-5. In Col 3:18-4, 1; Eph 5: 21-6,9 and in the Pastoral Letters (1 Tim 2:8-15; Titus 2:1-10), which are generally considered as Deutero-Paulines, one finds another literary list, *Haustafeln*. This term coming from Luther's *Deutsche Bibel* has become standard designation even in English. It means roughly "domestic bulletin board" and so may be considered as "household/domestic codes".
- 6 Cf. P. Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans. A Commentary* (trans. S.J. Hafemann) (Edinburgh 1994) 214.
- 7 The same pattern is seen in Col (3:1-4,6) and Eph (4:1-6, 20).
- 8 Cf. F. Pereira, *Gripped by God in Christ. The Mind and Heart of St. Paul* (Bombay 1991) 114-115.
- 9 Cf. H.D. Betz, "Paul," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* V, 198-99.
- 10 R. Bultmann, "The Problem of Ethics in Paul", (trans. C.W. Stenschke) *Understanding Paul's Ethics. Twentieth Century Approaches* (ed. B.S. Rosner) Grand Rapids, MI 1995) 195-216.
- 11 W. Bauer - W.F. Arndt - F.W. Gingrich - F.W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL<sup>2</sup> 1979) [hereafter BAGD] 617.
- 12 BAGD, 618.      13 Cf. Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 214-215.
- 14 Cf. J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh 1998) 630.
- 15 H. Ridderbos, *Paul. An Outline of His Theology* (trans. J.R. De Witt) (Grand Rapids, MI 1997) 253.
- 16 *The New American Bible* renders the *nomos* in Rom 3:27 as "principle": hence "the principle of faith".

- 17 Cf. J.A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (AB 33; London 1993) 131.
- 18 Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 132.
- 19 Cf. F.J. Matera, *Galatians* (Sacra Pagina 9; Collegeville, MI 1992) 124.
- 20 Cf. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 134. 21 Cf. Fitzmyer, "Theology", 1402.
- 22 Dunn, *Theology*, 112. The individual wrongful deeds of human beings, according to Paul, are "transgressions" (Gal 3:19; Rom 2:23; 4:15) "trespasses" (Gal 6:1; Rom 5: 15-18. 20), "sins" (hamartēmata, Rom 3: 25).
- 23 Cf. Pereira, *Gripped by God in Christ*, 117.
- 24 B. Byrne, *Romans* (Sacra Pagina 6; Collegeville, MI 1996) 212.
- 25 Cf. F. Blass – A. Debrunner – R.W. Funk, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (London – Chicago 1961) [hereafter BDF] § 167.
- 26 BDF § 165; cf. Rom 5:18, cf. Byrne, *Romans*, 242.
- 27 V.P. Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville 1968) 235, as cited by Dunn, *Theology*, 633.
- 28 E. Lohse, *Theological Ethics of the New Testament* (Minneapolis 1991) 161-162, as cited in Dunn, *Theology*, 633.
- 29 W. Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament* (Philadelphia – Edinburgh 1988) 206-207, as Dunn, *Theology*, 633.
- 30 Cf. "the law of faith" Dunn, *Theology*, (641)
- 31 Byrne, *Romans*, 242. Dunn even as he conceives of "the law of the Spirit" as the Law freed from the power of Sin, and experienced as a liberating power and as a law for living, notes that Paul does not still say of the Law as a life-giving power. See Dunn, *Theology*, 647, n. 104.
- 32 Cf. Byrne, *Romans*, 393.
- 33 Cf. Pereira, *Gripped by God in Christ*, 121-122.
- 34 Cf. Fitzmyer, *To Advance the Gospel*, 196; cf. Matera, *Galatians*, 183.
- 35 Cf. Byrne, *Romans*, 395. 36 Cf. Dunn, *Theology*, 659.
- 37 Cf. A. Vanhoye, *La lettera ai Galati*. Seconda Parte (Lecture notes; Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome <sup>2</sup> 1992) 180.
- 38 Cf. Fitzmyer, "Theology", 1413.
- 39 As Dunn, *Theology*, 664, n. 117 notes, *enkarteia* was considered as a cardinal virtue by Socrates and given full treatment in Aristotle's *Ethics*.
- 40 Cf. J.D.G Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (WBC 38A; Dallas, TX 1988) 61-62.
- 41 Cf. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 65-66.
- 42 Cf. Dunn, *Theology*, 665; cf. W. Grundmann, *TDNT VIII*, 1-4, 11-12.
- 43 Cf. Dunn, *Theology*, 664-655.
- 44 This rendering of *ou mē telesēte* as "you will certainly not gratify" by the NAB is to be preferred rather than that by NRSV "do not gratify." Although *ou me* with future indicative is a definite form of negation regarding the future (BDF § 365), the context here suggests the future since Paul is assuring the Galatians that they will overcome the flesh if they follow the Spirit. Cf. Matera, *Galatians*, 199.
- 45 Cf. Vanhoye, *La Lettera ai Galati*, 183.
- 46 Dodd, *Romans*, 198, says. "Christian morality is the response to **all the mercy of God**, which has been movingly set forth in the preceding chapters" (his emphasis).

# Attitudes and Practice - Gandhian Ethics as a Model

Jose Thachil

The author proposes to discuss ethics here from the Gandhian perspective. After an introduction on the Indian Philosophy of life he speaks of certain cardinal virtues it has emphasised, such as Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Aparigraha and Brahmacharya and new interpretations Gandhi has given to them especially to Ahimsa and Satya. Gandhi's advice to Christians is to live christianity without any addition or adulteration, to love like Christ, to make love their work-force. Rev. Dr. Jose Thachil has a Ph. D. in Philosophy and teaches Indian Philosophy at the Pontifical Institute, Aluva.

The philosophy of a place emerges from the ideas prevailing in the atmosphere. It is the realization of the eternal truths in the background of time, clime and culture. Though there have been different religions and philosophical systems representing a diversity of beliefs and thoughts, we can discern even in them the common stamp of Indian culture. This unity is of the nature of moral and spiritual outlook. Excepting the Cārvāka system and to a certain extent, Buddhism, all systems of Indian philosophy have defended the reality of the soul. Even though its existence was denied by the earlier Buddhism it was re-introduced by Mahayana Buddhism later<sup>1</sup>. The realization of the soul has been recognized here as the supreme end of human existence.

## The realization of the soul

The same Ultimate Reality viewed from the subjective side is called *Atman* and from the objective side *Brahman*. The distinctive meaning of Atman is the inner self of man whereas that of Brahman is the ultimate



source of the world. What is remarkable about these terms is that, though entirely different in their original connotation, they came to be usually used as synonyms - each signifying alike the eternal source of the universe, including nature and the human. The Absolute (Ultimate Reality) is Atman as well as Brahman. Hence Atman is Brahman. The Atman associated with body-mind organism is the individual self and Brahman associated with the world is *iśvara*. The individual self because of *avidya* regards itself different from the Ultimate Reality. When ignorance (*avidya*) is removed it will realize that it is Brahman which is the basis or soul of the outer world. This blending of the subject and object in a transcendental principle, this synthesis of the self and not-self in the Absolute, is the specific teaching of the Upaniṣads<sup>2</sup>. The mahāvākyas of the upaniṣads such as '*tat tvam asi*' (That Thou art)<sup>3</sup> '*aham Brahma asmi*' (I am Brahman)<sup>4</sup> etc. declare this identification of Atman and Brahman. When the individual self grows to the experiential awareness of this identification it attains self realization. As a consequence of this realization individual is identified with all the rest. The Atman is one. The differentiation is only due to body-mind organism. Once this is intuited, there can be no feeling of separateness from others and the welfare of so-called others becomes the welfare of oneself.

Paul Deussen, in a conversation with Swami Vivekananda spoke of the commandment: "Love thy neighbour as thyself" "If you ask why should I love my neighbour as myself, the reason can be found in the upaniṣads because the neighbour is thyself. Once, it is said, a young man went to Swami Vivekananda and made the complaint that in spite of worship and meditation, he could not find peace of mind. To him Swami replied: "My boy" "If you take my word, you will have first of all to open the door of your room and look around, instead of closing your eyes. There are hundreds of poor and helpless people in your neighbourhood; you have to serve them to the best of your ability. You will have to nurse and procure food and medicine for the sick. You will have to feed those who have nothing to eat. You will have to teach the ignorant. My advice to you is that if you want peace of mind, you shall have to serve others to the best of your ability"<sup>5</sup>.

### Spirituality and service

An ethical religion has to consider the problem of evil in its social or universal as well as in its individual dimensions. Karma has a social

dimension dealt with in cosmic ethics and is a powerful factor in shaping the moral progress of humanity. The *summum bonum* of human life is not merely the attainment of spirituality and mukti for oneself, but service to all '*Jivas*' so that they may also enjoy the bliss of divine life. The constant problem of universal religion is the removal of the dualism of individualism and socialism in the spiritual life and the reconciliation of the claims of self-culture and altruism, and of salvation and sarva mukti. The humanitarian should be interested more in the promotion of social well-being than in self-culture and self-realization. No unselfish man or woman can be at peace, when his neighbour's house is on fire or the modesty of a woman is outraged. To strive for and be satisfied with mukti while the rest of humanity suffers in this valley of tears, does not appeal to a selfless philanthropist. Ofcourse, sympathy for the sufferer is human enough, but it is difficult to find out the cause of suffering and cure the ills of humankind.

Several theories have been proposed to solve the problem of suffering. The materialism (*cārvāka*) has the limitation of confining the end of altruistic conduct to the physical realm only, and of denying the need for conservation of spiritual values. It is in a sense the degradation of human personality to the level of a brute. The utilitarian view that insists on the promotion of the greatest happiness of the greatest number is founded only on enlightened self-love. Even positivism that expounds the religion of humanity as love and service to humanity as a whole, ignores the dignity of human personality. Humanism, of course, goes further by recognizing the intrinsic value of personality; but in its insistence on better-worldliness as opposed to other-worldliness, it becomes purely secular. Buddhism rightly insists the need for the practice of universal benevolence or *jivakāruṇya*; but logically speaking how can there be love for Jiva when reality of Jiva is denied in the rejection of the permanent soul. Jainism recognises the soul but it lacks the religious motive since they reject God<sup>6</sup>.

Gita furnishes a very high ethical motive for the service of others and the religious motive for God realization as expounded by the Vedantic teachers. But a new orientation to its teaching has been given by some eminent modern Indian thinkers like Gandhi, Tilak, Aurobindo and others.

Here we propose to discuss ethics from the Gandhian perspective. Gandhi committed himself to the cause of political freedom of India.

Along with that, he was working for the liberation of Indians from various internal and external enslavements. His attention and activities extended to many spheres of life. As Pagne puts it "Most men who have profoundly affected history have possessed one-track minds: they have one aim, and spend their energies in obtaining it. Gandhi's aims, were various"<sup>7</sup>. Even when he was a politician, he was a man of social action, inspired by a religious interpretation of human existence. He said: "To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face, one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life"<sup>8</sup>.

### The Cardinal Virtues

Traditional Indian philosophy has emphasised the need of some cardinal virtues which every one should try to practise. Indian Ethics mentions five such: They are *Ahimsa* (Non-Violence), *Satya* (Truthfulness), *Asteya* (Non-Stealing), *Aparigraha* (Non-acceptance or Non-possession) and *Brahmacarya* (Chastity). Gandhi admits all these, and adds some more. While accepting all these, Gandhi gives a new interpretation to all these virtues in his own way . . . in the light of his own convictions - his own experiences. His one consideration is that these virtues must be interpreted in an up-to-date manner so that they may be consistent with the needs of the time and the prevailing situation of the place. Gandhi insisted that these virtues should be practised not only out-wardly, but in thought, speech and action. The aim of the ethical activities is attainment of purity, and complete purity can be attained only when a person is virtuous not only in act but also in thought and speech.

### *Ahimsa*

According to Gandhi ahimsa has a wider meaning than the literal sense of non-hitting. To quote Gandhi: "Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of ahimsa. But it is its least expression. The principle of ahimsa is violated by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody"<sup>9</sup>. Hence the followers of ahimsa should not only abstain from hurting anybody but also should love everybody. He should not entertain even an uncharitable thought against his opponent. He should not consider anybody his enemy, though there may be people who consider him their enemy<sup>10</sup>. But this does not mean that he should put up with injustice of his opponent. On the contrary he

should oppose every injustice, but in a non-violent way. He should be ready even to suffer death from the opponent, if necessary, but without even wishing any harm to the opponent.

### **Truth**

‘Satya’ in Sanskrit means existence. Hence Truth is conceived as God. How can we know Truth? And without knowing Truth how can we have regard for Truth? Gandhi says that Truth is self-revealing, but that we have become blind on account of our ignorance. According to Gandhi ignorance is not natural to the self. We rather closed our capacity for knowledge. The moral degradation or perversion of one kind or another causes ignorance. Gandhi explicitly mentions the six deadly enemies which cause prejudice, malice and ill-will to arise, on account of which the person is unable to see or feel the Truth. These deadly enemies are lust, anger, greed, infatualism, pride and falsehood. Therefore, in order to practise satya, one must constantly endeavour to free oneself from these evils, one must cultivate moral purity and courage and must not allow these enemies to cloud one’s vision. In a letter addressed to the members of the Sabarmati Ashram Gandhi wrote: “How beautiful it would be, if all of us, young and old, men and women, devoted ourselves wholly to Truth in all that we might do in our waking hours, whether working, eating, drinking or playing, till the dissolution of the body makes us one with Truth”<sup>11</sup>.

### **Non-stealing (Asteya)**

The term ‘asteya’ has been used in two senses: 1) If popularity means the observance of the rule of not taking away what belongs to the other unless it is given by him. 2) But to Gandhi it means more than that. “It is theft to take something from another even with his permission if we have no real need of it”<sup>12</sup>. Because according to Gandhi, one who takes anything that he does not need for his own immediate use, steals it from somebody else who is in need of it<sup>13</sup>. Stealing of ideas also comes under this vow. In short, the use of an article, or even the desire for it, which we do not really need is a theft and so was forbidden by the vow of non-stealing.

### **Non-acceptance (Aparigraha)**

It can be regarded as the extension of the vow of non-stealing. It forbids not only to possess anything or private property but also to keep



something which one does not need for simple living. As one progresses in the observance of this virtue, he will voluntarily reduce his wants. Because then he will understand that that civilization, in the real sense of the term consists not in multiplication but in deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants<sup>14</sup>. Apart from that, he comes to realize that it is a breach of love towards others, to possess something which one does not need and of which others are in need. Gandhi, ofcourse, is aware that it is not possible to practise this virtue in the absolute way, because absolute non-possession is impossible in life; even the body is a possession - the things needed for the body are also 'possessions', and therefore, so long as we are alive we cannot completely do away with possessions. Even so, aparigraha has to be practised to the best of one's capacity because this does away with the cause of rift in social life and provides a solid foundation for a universal love to flourish<sup>15</sup>.

### ***Celibacy (Brahmacarya)***

The word Brahmacarya etymologically means 'living in the Brahman'. In common parlance brahmacarya means control over the sex-function. Gandhi takes it in its most comprehensive sense. For him it consists in the fullest control over all senses in thought, word and deed. Even an impure thought is a breach of brahmacarya<sup>16</sup>. So according to Gandhi brahmacarya means: "control in thought, word and deed, of all senses at all times and in all places"<sup>17</sup>. Usually people want to control the animal passion without controlling other senses. "He who attempts to control only one passion, and allows all the others free play, is bound to find his effort futile. To hear suggestive stories with ears, to taste stimulating food with the tongue, to touch exciting things with hands and then at the same time expect to control the only remaining organs, is like putting one's hands in a fire and then expecting to escape being burnt. . . If we practise simultaneous self control in all directions the attempt will be scientific and possible to succeed"<sup>18</sup>.

### **How can Christianity be Naturalized in India?**

In an interview with Gandhiji Stanley Jones asked him: "How can we make christianity naturalized in India, not a foreign thing, identified with a foreign government and a foreign people, but a part of national life of India and contributing its power to India's uplift? What would you, as one of the Hindu leaders of India tell me, a Christian, to do in order to make this possible?"

He responded with great clarity and directness: "First, I would suggest that all of you christians, missionaries and all, must begin to love more like Jesus Christ. Second, practise your religion without adulterating it or toning it down. Third, emphasize love and make it your working force, for love is central to Christianity. Fourth, study non-christian religions more sympathetically to find the good that is within them, in order to have a more sympathetic approach to the people"<sup>19</sup>. Gandhiji put us unerringly on the spot in our individual and collective lives where we have to improve ourselves. First of all, we are worshipping Christ rather than following him. Jesus said : "... he who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Mat 10:38). It is quite possible to serve Christ and not to follow him - not follow him in Christ-like-living. Gandhiji said a more remarkable thing in the second point: "Practise your religion without adulterating it or toning it down". Of course, we don't reject it; we rather reduce it - reduce it to a creed to be believed, or an emotion to be felt, or an institution to belong to or a ceremony or rite to be practised - anything but a life to be lived. We have inoculated the world with a mild form of Christianity so that it is not proof against the real thing"<sup>20</sup>.

The most important thing to note here is that a genuine Hindu leader and the Father of the nation says: "your faith doesn't need to be changed; it does not need to be added to or subtracted from; it needs to be lived as it is. What he means to say is that there is no wrong or weakness in the thing itself; the weakness or wrong is in our practice. There is no demand to change Jesus; the demand is to change ourselves to make us more like Jesus. The third point that Gandhiji stressed was: "Emphasize love and make it your working force for love is central to Christianity". Here what Gandhiji means is not love as a mere sentiment but as an organized working force. To show the importance of love, he calls it by such different names as "soul-force"<sup>21</sup>, "law of our being"<sup>22</sup>. This commandment of religion is not fulfilled by mere mutual love but by loving even one's enemy: "I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt 5:44)<sup>23</sup>.

This does not mean that one who loves one's enemy or opponent, should put up with every injustice by converting his opponent. According to Gandhi, the only weapon with which one can convert one's opponent is love.

The fourth point: "Study the non-christian religions more sympathetically to find the good that is within them in order to have a more sympathetic approach to the people". This point is highlighted by Gandhiji in order to make us aware that very often Christians have approached the non-christian religious not with sympathetic insight to see the good, but with critical attitude to find the bad. Jesus "came not to destroy but to fulfill so that every truth found anywhere was a truth pointing to him who is the Truth. We could, therefore, rejoice in finding truth anywhere, knowing that it was God - implanted and would be God fulfilled in Christ<sup>24</sup>. We know that Jesus was not the enemy of any truth, found anywhere, but would lovingly gather it up in himself and fulfil it. But the end would not be a patchwork of truths; it would be a new product. This would not be eclecticism or syncretism. "Eclecticisms pick and choose, syncretisms combine; but only life assimilates". The Gospel is life, like a plant, it reaches down into the soil of every culture and takes out things which have an affinity to its own life and takes them up into its purposes and makes a new product out of them according to the laws of its own being. The end, therefore, is neither eclecticism nor syncretism, but life assimilating. We can be sympathetic to truth found anywhere and be true to our own gospel.

Thus the specific teachings of the upaniṣads like 'Atman is Brahman' formulated in mahavākyas, furnish the Indians reason and incentive for social action. On this basis the Bhagavadgītā lays the foundation for karmayoga which requires that actions should be performed with a spirit of detachment which involves not renunciation of action but renunciation in action. Gandhiji translated these principles into action and applied it as a strong weapon in the independent struggle. Since these teachings are already in the gospels Gandhiji wants Christians to live as Christ lived, to live Christianity without adulterating it or toning it down and holding fast the commandment of love. An attitude of fellowship basing on the sound knowledge of other religions will contribute much towards peaceful co-existence.

# Foot Notes

1. They say that it is the little individual ego which is false. But this apparent self has behind it the reality of one transcendental self, which is the self of all beings.
2. Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Varanasi, 1976, p. 20.
3. *Chandogya Upaniṣad* VI, 8,7.
4. *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10. Cf. P. Deussen, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie*, Vol 1, Leipzig, 1899, p. 311.
5. T. M. Mahadevan and G. V. Saroja, (quoted by) *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 20.
6. Srinivasachari P. N., *The Ethical Philosophy of the Gītā*, Madras, 1943, pp. 136-38.
7. Payne R., *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi*, London, 1969, p.14
8. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, New Delhi, 1958-1984, p. 401.
9. *From Yervada Mandir*, p.7.
10. C. F. Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*, London, 1949, p. 103.
11. C. F. Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*, p. 103.
12. *From Yervada Mandir*, pp. 19-20.
13. C. F. Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*, p. 106
14. *Yervada Mandir*, p. 21.
15. B. K. Lal, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, Delhi, 1973, p. 137.
16. *Harijan*, July 23, 1938, p. 192.
17. *Young India*, June 5, 1924, p. 186; *Harijan*, June 8, 1947; p. 180.
18. *From Yervada Mandir*, pp. 13-4.
19. E. Stanley Jones, *Mahatma Gandhi; An Interpretation*, Lucknow, 1963, pp. 64-65.
20. *Ibid.*,
21. M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, Ahmedabad, 1962, p. 77.
22. *Harijan*, Sept. 26, 1936, p. 260.
23. *Ibid*, May 11, 1947, p. 146.
24. E. Stanley Jones, *Mahatma Gandhi, An Interpretation*, Lucknow, 1963, p. 67.



# Walking in the Way of the Lord: A Study of the Ethics of Synoptic Gospels

Andrews Mekkattukunnel

The following article is a synthesis of the ethical orientations of Synoptic Gospels in the order of their formation: Mark's Ethics of Discipleship; New Righteousness of Matthew and Heart-felt Compassion of Luke. The aim is a constructive Christian ethics for an authentic Christian living. Rev. Dr. Andrews Mekkattukunnel with a Licentiate in Scripture from Pontifical Biblical Institute and a Doctorate in Biblical Theology from Gregorian University, is teaching Sacred Scripture in Paurastya Vidyapethan, Kottayam.

## Introduction

Human existence here on earth is a sojourn, a journey with Heaven as its goal. But who can approach God's holy mountain and dwell in God's holy place? Only those who walk blamelessly and do what is right (Ps 15:2). The tradition of describing the human conduct and life as "the way"<sup>1</sup> is as old as the humankind and the Sacred Scripture. Leading a life pleasing to God is described in the OT as walking in the law of the Lord. The Psalmist proclaims: "Blessed are those whose *way* is blameless who *walk* in the law of the Lord ... Thy word is a lamp to my *feet* and a light to my *path*" (Ps 119: 1.105). The Christian existence is all the more a journey destined for the kingdom of heaven. The way is shaped by the ethical demands of Jesus which take the place the law had in the OT. Jesus' life, attitudes, manner of behavior, preaching and teaching form an ideal and a model for his followers. Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom consisted in his calling disciples and preparing them for it. The basis and the source of the NT ethics is the nature and behavior of God, the Father and of Jesus, his incarnate Son.

The Gospels in general and Synoptic Gospels in particular are fundamental to the consideration of the ethical teaching of Jesus, for there is no other part in the NT that deals more with the earthly Jesus than these first three Gospels. They contain material closest to the Jesus tradition. The essential content and message of these three Gospels are three different but mutually related and complementary versions of one and the same Christ-event. The differences can be explained on the ground of varying theological perspectives. The variety of expressions, style, settings and historical background of the Synoptic Gospels makes the task of sketching out the ethics in them difficult. Each evangelist has his own ethical view corresponding to his theological outlook. Whereas the Markan ethics is primarily based on his concept of Discipleship, that of Matthew is concerned with the new Righteousness and of Luke one of Compassion. What follows is a short synthesis of the ethical orientations of the three Synoptic Gospels in the order of their formation: Mark, Matthew and Luke. We aim at a constructive Christian ethics for an authentic Christian living.

### **Ethics of Discipleship**

The theme of discipleship in the Gospel of Mark is second only to the central theme of the identity and meaning of Jesus<sup>2</sup>. This Gospel lays great emphasis on Jesus' summons to discipleship (Mk 1:16-20; 2:14; 3:13; 8:34; 10:52). Acknowledging Jesus as the Lord and Messiah implies certain changes in the orientations of life. God's eschatological act of salvation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth urges the humanity to a new way of life as is clear from the inaugural words of Jesus: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15). The invitation is to live under the sovereign rule of God, to accept God's rule sensing the over-whelming power and mystery of God<sup>3</sup>. This initial proclamation and the general call to repentance is followed by the call of the first disciples (Mk 1:16-20). The coming of the kingdom in the person of Jesus invites and enables the hearers to believe in the good news by following him.

Those called have a share in the mission of Jesus. They are to be with the Lord so that they may be sent out with the same mission as that of Jesus himself: to preach the good news of the kingdom and to have authority over evil powers (Mk 3: 13; 6.7). The disciples share in the destiny of Jesus as well. Each of the three passion predictions is

immediately followed by its implication in the lives of the disciples (Mk 8:31-38; 9:30-37; 10:32-45). We need to take a close look at these scenes for any idea about Mark's ethical vision.

It was in the context of Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ that Jesus first prophesied about his suffering, death and resurrection (Mk 8:27-33). Through this prophecy Jesus was making clear what kind of Messiah he would be. Then Jesus continued: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (v. 34). To become a disciple of Jesus means to follow him in the path of his suffering and cross. Three conditions are put forward: self-denial, daily carrying of the cross, and following him in the path of suffering and death to life. One has to deny oneself to become a real follower of Jesus. Only by losing the self can one save it for eternal life. The disciple has to follow Jesus on the way of the cross by sharing in his humiliation. Accepting the cross of the daily life and following Jesus in his way of suffering are not two different things. Call to discipleship implies readiness for self-denial, renunciation, and any possible risk. Disciple has to make an unconditional commitment to Jesus, cutting off all the ties with the world in a spirit of complete renunciation.

The second time when Jesus predicts his passion the disciples were discussing who among them was the greatest (Mk 9: 30-34). This gave Jesus an occasion to teach them that to be the first means to be the last and the servant of all (v. 35). Jesus himself was such among them. The disciple of Jesus is to follow this model. A similar situation occurs in the context of the third passion prediction too. This time two of the Twelve, John and James, come forward with the request for the seats of honor in Jesus' kingdom (Mk 10: 32-37). The fact that the other ten also were having the same ambition is clear from their indignation at the two (v. 41). Availing himself of the situation, Jesus exhorts them that authority in the community of his disciples is for service (vv. 42-43). Here also the Son of Man who came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many is the model for the disciples (v. 45). Following Christ means to have a share in Christ's life, mission, suffering and glory. Readiness to serve others and even to face martyrdom in that service is the challenge of Christian discipleship. The good news that Jesus brings is the truth that life comes through death (Mk 8: 31-35; 10: 45; 14:24).

Since Jesus did what he preached, his ethics flows from his pattern of life. Submitting himself absolutely to the will of the Father and offering himself for the whole humankind Jesus has shown the way we are to walk if we want to be his disciples. The discipleship is most complete in martyrdom in imitation of the passion of Jesus. Imitation in life leads to imitation in death too. St. Ignatius of Antioch, for example, thought of himself as "beginning" to be a disciple only when he was arrested to be thrown to the wild beasts. He writes: "Let me be food for the wild beasts, through whom I can reach God... Then I will truly be disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world will no longer see my body."<sup>4</sup> Following the footsteps of the Lord Jesus the disciple will enter the kingdom of God. This hope is reflected in the prayer of Polycarp at the time of his martyrdom: "I bless you because you have considered me worthy of this day and hour, that I might receive a place among the number of martyrs in the cup of your Christ, to the resurrection to eternal life..."<sup>5</sup> The Christian is challenged to imitate the Lord Jesus till death, in view of the new and eternal life.

### **Life of New Righteousness**

The greatest revelation Jesus made is that we have a heavenly Father, Abba, and that we are all his children (Matt 11: 27). The fact that we are God's children is to be manifested through our attempt to be perfect as he is (Matt 5:48). The perfection of God, according to Matthew, consists in his unconditional and universal love for the just and the unjust alike (Matt 5:45). This is the righteousness of God; it is this righteousness that humankind is called upon to attain by loving as the Father himself loves. Our experience of God's love and mercy for us should guide us in loving our debtors (Matt 18:34). Through his preaching and teaching Jesus exposes the divine righteousness and the ways and means to reach this goal.

Kingdom of heaven/God is the imagery employed by Jesus to bring home the nature of God's righteousness. Kingdom is the offer of God's love to us in the person of Jesus. The presence of the kingdom necessitates a total break with the old way of life and a response of repentance (Matt 4:17). Complete turning of the whole person to God is intended by repentance (cf. Isa 31:6; Jer 3:12-14). Repentance as the entrance requirement for the kingdom of heaven is specified by Matthew as the new righteousness. To enter the kingdom of God one has to seek the



righteousness (Matt 6:33) and the ethics is concerned with the effort of seeking this righteousness<sup>6</sup>.

The ethical instructions on the new righteousness in the Gospel of Matthew are the imperatives derived from the indicative statement of the mercy of God in the kingdom of heaven<sup>7</sup>. It is faith in Jesus that conditions the Christian morality. The way of righteousness is opened by Jesus' interpretation of the Torah, the manifestation of the divine will, for the humankind. His authoritative teachings contain the authentic formulations of the will of God; they point out to us the way of righteousness along which we should walk. Total re-orientation of every area of activity and work is demanded. Obedience to the will of God as revealed in the Torah and Jesus' interpretation will result in righteousness; the means of acquiring this righteousness is stipulated by the sermon on the mount which is the quintessence of his moral teaching, the heart of his ethics.

The righteousness expected of the followers of Christ is to be superior to that of the Pharisees and scribes (Matt 5: 20). Jesus' answer to the question about the greatest commandment spells out the nature of this higher righteousness. The greatest commandment on which all the law and the prophets depend is a double commandment of love (Matt 22:34-40): the love of God (Deut 6:5) and the love of one's neighbor (Lev 19:18). Love of neighbor is placed on a level with love of God. This is the absolute will of the Father. Loving God with all one's heart and loving one's neighbor as oneself, loving one's neighbor is the concrete actualization of one's love for God<sup>8</sup>.

According to the Pharisaic understanding "neighbor" meant the member of their own community. Jesus interpreted the term in a wider sense to include all human beings. One's Love directed to God the Father cannot ignore one's neighbors, God's own children. In fact the concern for one's neighbor is the test of one's love of God. Jesus, the Son of God, identified himself with the little ones (Matt 18: 5; 25: 31-46). Therefore, it is God himself who is honored when the neighbor is loved and served. The Christian has to take the initiative in reaching out to others to do good. This is what Jesus states in the golden rule: "Whatever you wish men would do to you, do so to them" (Matt 7:12). The natural human instinct is the desire to be loved by others. The awareness that others also have the same desire to be loved should prompt me to take the first step in the direction of loving my neighbor<sup>9</sup>.

The moral heroism demanded of the follower of Jesus is the love of enemies. "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust ... You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:44-48)<sup>10</sup>. Without any condition, the disciple is urged to love. Love for the enemy has to be manifested in concrete action; when the Christian prays for his persecutor, he is, in fact, giving expression to his love for the enemies. The only means to prove oneself to be worthy of God is to love even one's enemies. The Christian is invited to imitate the perfection of the heavenly Father. God's perfection which consists in mercy that knows no bounds is the goal of Christian life.

The unconditional love of one's neighbor is to guide us in matters of daily life. Its priority over against the rules of sacrifice is clear from Jesus' own words: "So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt 5: 23-24). Reconciliation with the fellow human being has precedence over one's religious duties. This reconciliation is a *sine qua non* for obtaining the divine mercy (Matt 5: 25-26; 6: 12-15; 18: 21-35). Neither mere compliance with the written law nor the external performance of it in the practice of cult and custom is ethically adequate to enter the kingdom. What is needed is internal opening of heart to God and an interiorized performance of the law.

The commandment of love is the hermeneutical key to interpret all other commandments of the Decalogue. Thus getting angry with someone or insulting someone calling him "fool" is a partial murder (Matt 5: 21-22); the lust of the eye violates the sixth commandment (Matt 5: 27-30). The righteousness demanded of a Christian affects not only the level of action but of intention as well. Questions on marriage and divorce also are to be handled in the light of the love commandment (Matt 5: 31-32; 19: 3-12). Since the Christian behavior is motivated by the love of neighbor there is no room for oaths (Matt 5: 33-37) or judgments on others (Matt 7:1-5); neither is there place for retaliation in the life of a Christian. The disciple is not to resist the evil. If anyone strikes him/her on the right cheek, he/she is to turn the other too; if anyone accuses

him/her falsely and treats inhumanly he/she is to suffer it (Mtt 5:39-41) evil is to be overcome by good.

Unlike the Pharisaic righteousness that of Christians does not make a show of itself before others. Almsgiving, prayer and fasting are to be performed in such a way as to be seen only by the heavenly Father that he may duly reward us (Matt 6:1-18). What matters is the purity of intention and the internal attitude.

Loving God above all things with an undivided heart (Matt 6:24) means to trust in the divine providence (Matt 6: 25-34). The command not to be anxious is the call to faith with undivided heart in the words of Jesus which are the manifestations of the will of God <sup>11</sup>. The beatitudes with which Jesus begins his sermon on the mount bring out the blessedness of those who trust completely in God. The poor, the hungry, the crying, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peace-makers, and the persecuted are blessed because of their absolute trust in the salvation brought by God in the person of Jesus (Matt 5: 1-12). Ethical conduct is the faith lived. Mere proclamation of faith or even great deeds done in the name of the Lord will not help without a life of righteousness expressed in love (7:21-27). Disciples' call is to function as "the salt of the earth and the light of the world". The disciples' good works allow the world to recognize God's presence among them.

On the whole the distinguishing mark of the new righteousness preached by Jesus is the internal attitude in the observance of the law motivated by the concern and consideration for the fellow-human being created in the image and likeness of God. The Christian righteousness is a call to ontological perception of reality transcending the mere rational thinking characterized by the concern for the self alone. The human person is at the center of this new righteousness.

### **Existence of Heart-felt Compassion**

Salvation which Jesus brings, according to Luke, is experienced in the forgiveness which stems from God's compassion for the sinner. For Luke the incarnation of Jesus is the dawning of the dayspring from on high to save the humankind by granting forgiveness as an expression of the tender mercy of God (Lk 1:77-79: *dia splachna eleous theou hemon*). The liberation brought by Jesus has necessarily to do with forgiveness (Lk 4: 18: *aphesis*). It was out of compassion for the widow of the Nain that Jesus brought her dead son back to life (Lk 7: 13-15).

The miracle of the multiplication of the bread for the five thousand resulted from Jesus' compassionate concern for the crowd (Lk 9: 12-17). The forgiveness available in the person of Jesus was the manifestation of the compassion of the heavenly Father, for Jesus himself was the result of God's remembering of his mercy promised to the fathers (Lk 1: 54-55, 72-73). The risen Lord commissioned his disciples to proclaim forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations (Lk 24: 47). Thus Jesus is an exemplar of generous and effective compassion for all in need. Behind the merciful acts of Jesus there was always a heart full of compassion.

It is this mercy and compassion of God manifested in the person of Jesus that a disciple is called upon to imitate (Lk 6: 35-36). The command to love our enemies is motivated by the merciful nature of God. Luke interprets God's impartial dealing with the just and the unjust as his kindness towards the ungrateful and the selfish (compare Matt 5: 44-45 with Lk 6: 35). In the place of the Matthean exhortation to be perfect as the heavenly Father (Lk 5: 48) Luke has: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). The compassion that motivates the father to welcome back his prodigal son (Lk 15: 20) and that moves the good Samaritan to care for the wounded Jew (Lk 10: 33) should inspire the follower of Jesus to act likewise (Lk 10:37). Acts of charity without the heart would be empty. They should spring from a heart that throbs for the neighbor.

The proper use of the wealth at the service of the community, is an expression of the inner compassion. The examples of the rich farmer (Lk 12:16-21) and of the rich man who did not notice the poor Lazarus at his door (Lk 16: 19-31) are warnings for Christians against the dangers of riches. The model behavior of Zacchaeus (Lk 19: 1-10; cf. 16:9) who uses the unrighteous mammon to win friends for him in the eternal habitations is to be followed by the disciples. The one who leaves family and possessions for Jesus' sake will gain eternal life in the age to come (Lk 18: 29-30). This Christian concept of stewardship of money encourages one to spend it for the needs of the under-privileged. If wealth and possessions are accepted as God's unmerited gifts for us, it would not be difficult to share them with the fellow human beings.

The life of fellowship in the early Christian community was marked by sharing all things in common (Acts 2:24-47; 4:32-37). This was the expression of the unity of their mind and heart. All members had their



needs met. This communion (Acts 2:42: *koinonia*) among the faithful was best expressed in their Eucharistic celebrations. The "breaking of the bread" was the symbolic re-enactment of the whole mystery of Christ, the core of which is compassion itself. They were celebrating what they lived outside, a life of compassionate concern for the other.

It is worth noting that the lion's share of Jesus' ethical teachings in Luke occur in the central section of the Gospel - the so-called travel narrative (Lk 9: 51-19: 27). Jesus is being depicted here as heading forward to Jerusalem to fulfill the will of the Father through his suffering, death and resurrection. During this long journey Jesus is accompanied by his disciples. This was the period of formation for his disciples. Jesus was training them through his own life - through his words and deeds, both of compassion. Discipleship, according to Luke, is being with Jesus on the way to Jerusalem. It is against this backdrop that Luke presents Christianity as "the Way" in the Acts of the Apostles (9:2; 18:25-26; 19:9-23; 24:14-22)<sup>12</sup>. The Christian living is walking in this way in the footsteps of Jesus.

## Conclusion

The people of God in the OT were required of nothing less than the holiness of Yahweh (Lev 19:2). What Jesus did was to reveal the perfection of the heavenly Father and to invite his disciples to imitate it. Matthew interpreted this perfection as righteousness and Luke as compassion and mercy. For Mark this perfection of God was manifested in the suffering of Jesus. It is this suffering, compassion and righteousness of God as revealed in the life of Jesus that the believer in Christ is asked to follow. The disciples share in the life and destiny of Jesus. To follow Christ means to walk the way of suffering, righteousness and compassion. This way is narrow and difficult to tread; still this is the one that leads to life. In other words the ethics of the Synoptic Gospels is a walking in the way of the Lord.

The second century Christian document *Didache* has a beautiful description of the way to be followed by the believer which reflects the same tradition about the ethical teaching of Jesus as that of the Synoptic Gospels. "There are two ways, one of life and one of death: and great is the difference between the two ways. The way of life is this: first, you shall love God, who created you; second, your neighbor as yourself. Whatever you would not wish to be done to you, do not do to another. The teaching of these words is this: bless those who curse you, and pray

for your enemies; fast for those who persecute you... love those who hate you, and you will not have an enemy" (1:1-3). From this it is evident that the evangelists were giving expression to the ethical views current in the community of believers.

Today the way a Christian is to walk is the way of Jesus Christ himself, the way of suffering that leads to eternal life, the way of new righteousness which is the condition for entering the kingdom of God, and the way of compassion which is essentially oriented towards the neighbor.

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### Foot Notes

1. John Chrysostome, *On the Satutes*, 2: 17 writes: "On earth man is a stranger and a pilgrim and must look to the heavenly country for final reward".
2. P. S. Pudussery, The Meaning of the Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark" *Jeevadhara X*, 56(1980) 93-110.
3. J. L. Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament* (Harmondsworth 1973) 41-46.
4. Ignatius of Antioch, *The Letter to Romans*, 4 taken from Michael W. Holmes (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers* (trans. J. Lightfoot, J. R. Harmer: Grand Rapids MI, 1989) 103.
5. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 14:2.
6. H. Windisch, *The Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount*, tr. S MacLean Gilmour (Philadelphia 1951) 27.
7. E. Lohse, *Theological Ethics of the New Testament* (Minneapolis 1988) 63.
8. G. M. Soares-Prabhu, The Synoptic Love Commandment", *Theology of Liberation: An Indian Biblical Perspective*, (ed. F. X. D'Sa, Pune 2001) 114; he continues (115): "To experience God as 'Father' is to experience the neighbor as 'brother'. see also V. P. Furnish, *The Love Commandment in the New Testament* (London 1973) 48.
9. Clement of Rome in his *Letter to the Corinthians* (XL VIII) exhorts: "Let us fall down before the Lord, and beseech Him with tears, that He would mercifully be reconciled to us, and restore us to our former seemly and holy practice of brotherly love. For [such conduct] is the gate of righteousness, which is set open for the attainment of life".
10. The Greek term for "perfect" *teleios* means "whole hearted, undivided in love". J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, I (London 1975) 212.
11. Lohse, *Ethics*, 71.
12. See, P. Kariamadam, "India and Luke's Theology of the Way", *Bible Bhashyam XI*, 1-2 (1985) 47-60.

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